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THE MAN OF A GHOST

BY

PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN

LONDON ,

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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TO
NEGLEY FARSON
WITH THE HOPE THAT
THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR
MAY BE LONG

PROLOGUE

THERE is a haunted bungalow at Napierpur, in India, the scene of a tragedy in Mutiny or pre-Mutiny days.

On the night before the return of Captain Thorburn of Napier's Horse, they were talking about it, as it happened, at Mess, the latest-joined subaltern (an amateur of the occult) being curious and interested.

The Senior Subaltern, a profound believer, was laughed to scorn by his Squadron-Leader, a sceptic and a cynic, who believed in what he saw, and then only when strictly sober.

And, as the discussion developed, there emerged as usual the three attitudes, that of the unbelievers, that of the believers, and that of the open-minded unconvinced. But definitely the sceptics prevailed, mightily, and with contempt.

It was thus a curious coincidence, that on his return next day, Captain Thorburn—tall and slim, fair, with pale-blue eyes and a pointed inquisitive nose above a little upturned wiry moustache which in no-wise concealed the firm lips of a well-cut mouth, least imaginative and most matter-of-fact of men—should announce that he had seen a ghost.

He had gone on shooting-leave, had travelled by train to Karachi, and thence by native bunder-boat along the Mekran coast to a mountainous spot where

ibex were sometimes to be found. But Fortune had not favoured the brave *shikari*.

"Well, Thorburn, see any ibex?" enquired Colonel Warre, commanding Napier's Horse, tall, grey, grim and saturnine, greeting Captain Thorburn at lunch next day.

"No, Sir. Saw nothing at all . . . except a ghost," was the reply.

"A ghost? What, in the Talar Mountains?"

"No, Sir. Near a caravanserai at Godoz, on the Gulf."

"Ghost!" snapped Major Sampson, thick-set, short, rubicund and endowed with a liver. "Ghost—in a caravanserai. Ghost of a man, d'ye mean?"

"Yes," replied Thorburn, "in a manner of speaking."

"Or perhaps it was really the man of a ghost," he added, smiling.

"What the devil *are* you talking about?" enquired Major Sampson.

"A ghost . . . The ghost of a man," replied Thorburn, in his quiet and serious way.

"What man?"

"Richard Wendover."

"What!" ejaculated the Colonel. "Good God! You don't mean to say . . ."

"I do, Sir. He was the man of this ghost, I'll swear."

"You've been dreaming—or drinking," growled the Major. "No wonder you didn't see any ibex . . . *Richard Wendover!* What next? . . ."

"Tell us," requested the Colonel.

"Well, I had made the *naukhada* of my bunder-boat

put in several times between Karachi and Godoz ; places like the mouth of the Hingol River, Ormara, Basul River, Pasni, and such, and had tried to get *khabar*¹ of ibex. I had no luck, and decided to get a bit farther inland. My *shikuri* made a camel-*bando-bast*,² and I made a chukka round, overland, and struck the coast near Godoz, where the boat was waiting for me. A few miles outside Godoz there is an old caravan-serai and, near it, I found a biggish camp and camel-market, with all sorts of *budmashes*³ loafing around ; Afghans, Baluchis, Ghilzais, Afridis, Mahsuds, Mohmands and assorted Pathan ruffians, a very tough crowd who might quite well have been with one of the Powindah gun-running gangs.

"As my little caravan rode by this camp, I noticed that the camel-guards, loafing about, eyed me without enthusiasm or affection, quite definitely."

"Probably thought you were a Secret Service man on this anti-gun-running stunt," observed the Colonel.

"That's what I thought, and didn't linger, but pushed straight on towards Godoz. And just beyond this camp, in a very narrow pass, between precipices, I met a couple of Pathans on the track leading to it. One of those two Pathans was the ghost I have mentioned."

"The ghost of Richard Wendover!" mused the Colonel, nodding his head slowly.

"Are you absolutely certain?" asked a guest of the Napier's Horse Mess, a Major Hazelrigg, known as "Ganesh the Elephant God," who appeared deeply interested. "Really Richard Wendover?"

Major Sampson emitted a loud and somewhat

¹ News.

² Arrangement.

³ Scoundrels, rogues.

unpleasant noise which was either a snort of derision, a laugh of contempt, or a combination of the two.

"Why, the feller was killed in Africa," he said. "They found his body. That chap building the Tabundi Railway buried him, didn't he?"

"This was Richard Wendover—or his ghost," repeated Captain Thorburn.

"In point of fact, you really saw a Pathan who faintly resembled Wendover—or you thought you did," growled Major Sampson. "And as you didn't see any ibex, you come back and tell us you saw the ghost of a man, eh?"

"Or the man of a ghost," murmured Ganesh Hazelrigg softly. "The live man of a poor dead ghost, eh?"

"It was the ghost of Richard Wendover, then," smiled Thorburn.

"Resemblance as strong as all that, was it?" observed the Colonel.

"And stronger," replied Thorburn quietly. "I spoke to the—ghost.

"*'Salaam-un-alaik,'* said I, and the ghost's companion promptly replied:

"*'Alaik-us-salaam.'*

"*'May you never be tired,'* said I correctly, in my best Pushtu, and,

"*'May you never be poor,'* duly countered the ghost's companion, as the Pathan always does. But never a word spake the ghost—whom I had addressed personally, directly and pointedly—which struck me as curious; or rather, as not at all curious, but as entirely bearing out my belief, fantastic as that was.

"And before they could dismount on the narrow

path where there was no room to pass mounted, I leant across to him, to it, to the ghost, and said quietly. in English:

“ ‘ *I know your face.* ’

“ And,

“ ‘ *Congratulations,* ’ replied the ghost unpleasantly in purest English and with a bitter sort of sneer. ‘ *So nice for you.* ’

“ And the man of that ghost was undoubtedly Richard Wendover, for in that sentence I recognized his voice and knew it as well as I knew his face.

“ ‘ *And I know your name,* ’ I added.

“ ‘ *So do I,* ’ said the ghost.

“ ‘ *It is . . .* ’ I began.

“ ‘ *Gul Mahommed,* ’ he interrupted.

“ ‘ *I see,* ’ said I.

“ ‘ *I’m glad you do,* ’ said he, and added, ‘ *I suppose you haven’t a train to catch, or anything ?* ’

“ As the nearest train was a few hundred miles away, I hadn’t; but I took the hint, and yet I hated going off and leaving him like that.

“ ‘ *Look here, is there anything I can do for you—er—Gul Mahommed ?* ’ I said.

“ ‘ *Yes,* ’ replied the ghost. ‘ *You can push on.* ’

“ ‘ *In fact,* ’ said I, ‘ *you’d prefer that I should ‘wend over’ the hill there, eh ?* ’

“ And with an impish grin that I knew, oh, so well, and the short laugh of a man who has forgotten how to laugh, Wendover nodded.”

“ And of course that clinched it, eh ? ” mused Ganesh Hazelrigg. “ Yes, I think you did see—a ghost.”

“ I know I did, Sir . . . ” And the man of that

ghost was Richard Wendover who once ~~was~~ one of Us," replied Captain Thorburn.

Major Sampson snorted ; the Colonel pursed judgmental lips as he wrinkled thoughtful considering brows ; and Major Ganesh Hazelrigg made careful note that his beloved friend, Richard Wendover, long believed to be dead, was alive, was in Mekran, was apparently engaged in gun-running, and was probably on his way to Afghanistan or the North-West Frontier—the wrong side of it.

PART I

CHAPTER I

CAPTAIN RICHARD WENDOVER was almost worried.

A more imaginative man, one more nervous and highly strung, would have been quite worried. For he and his men were in parlous state and, for the first time in his life, he was in a military position that he felt he did not understand, a situation that filled him with doubt. For he was not absolutely certain of the loyalty of his colleague, a man upon whom he should have been able to depend for all possible assistance, for frank companionship, for stout support, and for ungrudging and unstinted effort.

Nor had he the fullest trust in every one of the native officers and men under his command.

A most unsatisfactory and indeed disturbing state of affairs—for the general situation was already sufficiently bad, without this particular difficulty and unusual danger from within.

However, the facts that the Fort was surrounded by an extremely active, watchful and aggressive enemy; that communication with its base was completely cut off; that food, supplies and ammunition were running very low, troubled him not at all—and the other was only a matter of suspicion, albeit strong-suspicion, rapidly growing.

Deep in the heart of the African jungle stood this

little *boma*, with its garrison of a company of sepoy ; its wide surrounding trench and high loop-holed stockade—a wall of earth, two feet thick, between stout high hurdles of plaited pliant branches—enclosing rude grass-thatched *bandas*, huts which served the purposes of Officer's quarters, store-houses, cook-house, hospital and combined Orderly-Room and Officers' Mess.

Apart from these *bandas*, and near the stockade walls, long communal dwelling-places of wattle-and-daub, thatched with plaited palm-leaf, provided rude shelter for the sepoy.

Not an attractive spot ; scarcely a home from home ; and everyone in it had been in it far too long.

So thought Captain Richard Wendover as he yawned, stretched himself, struck a match and glanced at his wrist-watch.

Yes, he thought so. Two minutes to five. Curious how he always woke just before the *reveille* bugle. Funny thing that. But there were fellows who said that if you bumped your head five times on the pillow before you went to sleep, and said, " I will wake at five," you would infallibly do so.

He had never tried that, and he had no need to do so ; for, regularly as the clock, he woke just in time to yawn, stretch, look at his watch and wait a minute or so for *reveille*.

Punctually the bugle blew. Good old Shere Khan. He was no bugler himself, but he'd damn' well see that a bugle was blown by somebody, and to the minute. Priceless chap. Pity he wasn't Subedar-Major.

But on the other hand, he certainly saw and heard more, and was probably far more useful as a sepoy orderly. Besides, he really hadn't the brains for a

Native Officer's job and, happily, was entirely devoid of ambition.

No, Shere Khan would scarcely do as *naik* or *havildar*, much less as *jemadar* or *subedar*.

And yet there was no man as valuable in the outpost, and he would sooner have parted with any Native Officer or non-commissioned officer, than with Shere Khan. Sooner have parted with Breckinge. Very much sooner.

Cruel hard luck that poor dear old Hunter-Ward had been killed, and Alec Breckinge—hadn't. He had been a tower of strength, Hunter-Ward, even when malaria and dysentery had left him without any strength of his own. His cheerfulness alone had been worth anything. Priceless. And a lot of the men had been very fond of him indeed, and would have listened to him instead of to Breckinge.

Yes, a tower of strength—and Breckinge a source of weakness. Damn Breckinge. He'd twist his tail for him, the first time he got a chance and a reason. That was where the fellow was so infernally clever. There was nothing to take hold of, and you can't twist a tail until you can take hold of it.

Richard Wendover grinned.

As the mournful notes of *reveille* rang out on the still, dank air of the hot dark morning, Wendover arose from his camp-bed, and dressed for the day by putting on his helmet. As he had lain down for a brief rest at three o'clock, in boots, putties, khaki cotton shirt and shorts, there was nothing else to put on.

Stepping out of his *banda*, the rickety hut built of saplings, interlaced branches, reeds, grass and palm-leaves, Captain Richard Wendover ran an experienced and observant eye over the too-familiar scene, with

its two intersecting "streets" of porter-built huts; its Officers' Mess in the central square, consisting of four posts and a roof of trellis and grass, with a floor of mud, and its furniture of a table made with four stumps and some packing-case boards, and native frame-and-string beds for chairs.

How he wished Shere Khan would not keep Hunter-Ward's place at the uneven roughly-nailed table, with the stencil-marks yet upon its packing-case boards. Was it just force of habit, or superstition, that made him pull up a seat to the side where the poor chap had always sat?

Would there be any tea this morning?

He knew that the small store was running very low, but, each day, forbore to ask whether there would be any to-morrow.

Having no tea would be worse than having no whisky. Far worse. Tea was a necessity. In the morning, anyhow.

Whisky at night. Just as necessary, really, when one was whacked to the wide, and too tired, or anxious, to sleep.

It would come as a real blow when Shere Khan told him there was no more tea, although daily he expected it. A genuine hardship. How could one begin the day in a place like this, without a big basin of tea, hot and strong and sweet?

Suppose there were none this morning, just when he was feeling rather more sleep-starved, shaky, giddy—and sick than usual. One must keep one's sense of proportion, of course, but at the moment, he wasn't quite sure which of the three troubles was the worst—the death of Hunter-Ward whom he really loved; the

certainly that Breckinge and some of the men were disloyal ; or the fact that the end of the stock of tea was in sight.

Love ; loyalty ; and tea.

Suppose there were none to-day ! Well, he'd have to drink his water ration. It was the colour of tea, anyhow, what with mud, stewed leaf-mould and general assorted filth . . .

No. Good. Here came Shere Khan with the metal teapot which had once been enamelled white, a condensed-milk tin and a mug.

Lacking a tray, but knowing what was fitting, he bore these things upon a piece of wood which had once formed the side of a box.

The teapot contained good strong Sergeant-Major's tea ; the condensed-milk tin, some brown sugar ; and the mug, yet another piece of wood useful for stirring and other purposes.

" I think we'll put that in the sugar-basin," smiled Wendover, sticking the wood upright in the sugar, " and call it a spoon."

Sepoy Shere Khan, who spoke little English but apparently understood everything that was said to him in that language, grinned cheerfully, his saturnine and forbidding countenance, with its blue-black beard, heavy black moustache, and thick beetling black eyebrows, changing and lighting up as does a dark and stormy sky when through a rift the sun beams brightly.

The distance from the top of his high-piled *puggri*, wound about his tall conical *kullah* cap, to the soles of his heavy ammunition boots must have been over seven feet ; for, bare-headed and bare-footed, Shere Khan was six feet and six inches in height ; a man of

tremendous shoulder-breadth, barrel-like chest, mighty girth of arm and thigh; a magnificent specimen of the Pathan race, great and hard of thew and sinew and, like so many of his compatriots, loyal to the core and faithful unto death, when once loyalty and fidelity had been won and given.

This was a man.

As they stood in speech, the two, Officer and Sepoy, were not unlike, for both were tall and broad beyond the ordinary, and the Englishman, naturally sallow, and tanned by the sun, was also of dark complexion, his hair, moustache and eyebrows being black and the iris of his eyes dark brown.

Had the two exchanged clothing, the Englishman donning the Pathan's head-gear and tunic, and the Pathan shaving off his beard, the difference would not have been very great.

"What about the *Daktar-Sahib*?" asked Wendover, raising his eyebrows in assumed surprise.

The Pathan grunted and observed that there was very little tea.

"Fetch another cup," directed Wendover, and smiled to himself when, a minute later, the other mug was brought by the filthy black-faced nondescript who called himself a cook. If there was nothing that Shere Khan would not do for Captain Richard Wendover, there was nothing that he would do for Lieutenant Alec Breckinge.

No, thought Wendover, Shere Khan had taken Breckinge's measure all right, and regarded him in very much the same way as he himself did.

And here he came with his jaunty swagger and false smile.

§ 2

Lieutenant Alec Breckinge, of the Indian Medical Service, was also of dark complexion, but with a darkness due not, as in the case of Richard Wendover, to exposure. He was wont to blame the sun, but would have been more accurate had he accused his mother and grandmother instead. For, although he was, as he would inform you at the very earliest opportunity, the grandson of a British General, he was also the grandson of an Indian sweeper-woman of caste so low as to have no caste, to be an outcaste—an Untouchable, in fact.

Untouchable by an Indian, that is to say. For General Sir Percy Vereker Breckinge, K.C.M.G., K.C.S.I., had found her quite otherwise. And, in the spacious manner of his day and kind, had temporarily promoted her to a place in that part of his unwieldy and ever-expanding household known to irreverent subordinates as his harem.

Not a few of the remarkable soldiers who served John Company lived more in the style of Indian Rajahs than of English gentlemen; and, when gathered to their fathers, or returned to their native land, left behind them quite a considerable number of sons who inherited their father's name and nothing else from that side of the family, save perhaps a strain or streak of the more stalwart virtues and a skin lighter than that of the pure-bred Indian.

From their low-caste mothers, these unfortunates were apt to inherit vices additional to those of the fathers; and, inevitably, from the twain inherited the cruel curse of the half-caste, the Eurasian.

It was not General Sir Percy Vereker Breckinge's

habit to treat his half-breed dusky sons as he did his white ones. For the latter, Home and the Public School; for the former, anything they could get on the strength of their name, generally a very small and subordinate position in some such Government Department as that of the Revenue, Gaol, Public Works, Salt and Abkari, or the Police.

And into the Indian Police went General Sir Percy Vereker Breckinge's son, Vereker, who was this Lieutenant Alec Breckinge's father, in the grade of European Constable. And from that grade, by virtue of his perfect knowledge of the country, the people, and the language; his undoubted ability and courage; his distinguished name; and a certain unscrupulousness of method, he rose steadily to gazetted rank, and, eventually, to the grade and position of Superintendent of Police.

Unfortunately, while yet a constable, young, ardent and impetuous, he married a woman who, whatever her claims to virtue and to beauty, possessed not the most modest share of European blood, her father being an excellent da Costa and her mother an admirable da Silva, both late of Goa, and of pure low-caste Indian descent.

However, Mr. Vereker Breckinge, Superintendent of Police, did better for his son, Alec, than his father had done for him; gave him the best education that he could afford; enabled him to qualify as a doctor, and lived to see him commissioned as Lieutenant in the admirable and excellent Indian Medical Service, which, though consisting of English gentlemen as to some ninety-five per cent of its personnel, is open, in theory, to any British subject who can qualify for admission to its exclusive ranks.

And yet, in this success, Mr. Vereker Breckinge was happier than Alec Breckinge, his successful son.

True, to Alec Breckinge, it was delightful to wear, upon occasion, the distinguished uniform of the Indian Medical Service, with helmet, sword and gold braid ; delightful to have military rank, and to know that one would rise, through the grades of Captain and Major, to Colonel ; and might, with good luck and hard work, become Surgeon-General of a Presidency.

It gave one, and most particularly one who was a Eurasian, a heart-warming and soul-satisfying sense of established place and position, rank and social security.

But, unfortunately, it did not give one a white skin ; and that of Alec Breckinge was definitely dark ; far darker than that of his Eurasian father or his Goanese-Indian mother ; a throw-back, indeed, to the tribe of his low-caste sweeper grandmother.

And the darkness of his countenance darkened the outlook, and, indeed, the whole life, of Lieutenant Alec Breckinge of the I.M.S. For, on the subject of colour, he was extremely sensitive ; always on the look out for slights, snubs and differentiations. And every real or imagined slight, every fancied or intended snub, every illusory or actual differentiation between him and brother officers of British birth and origin, became an insult, each insult deliberate, intentional and cruel.

Nor, unfortunately, was there utter lack of grounds for complaint ; complete absence of reasons for hurt, for indignation, and for injured pride. There is undeniably a colour-feeling among European society in India, a prejudice against mixed blood ; a colour-bar exists and a strong and clear demarcation line is drawn. One of the most unpleasant and wounding allegations

that can be made by one alleged European concerning another, is that he or she has "a touch of the tar-brush."

This does not deny for one moment that there exists a very warm regard, appreciation and admiration on the part of very many Europeans for very many Indians; but the Indian and the European move, socially, in water-tight compartments; belonging not to each other's Clubs, exchanging practically no hospitality; and the fault, if fault it be, lies with both sides.

But while the European and the Indian may entertain strong mutual regard, neither has, generally speaking, any kindness for the offspring of both.

Lieutenant Alec Breckinge then, though far more often wrong than right, was occasionally not mistaken in thinking that certain social invitations failed to reach him which would have reached him but for his complexion, and which did reach his European colleagues; and that many a Mamma who would have looked without fear and with favour upon the association of her daughter with other members of his Service, was not at all anxious that Lieutenant Alec Breckinge should become friendly with the young lady.

This is a hard and cruel state of affairs maintained by people who are neither hard nor cruel, but who naturally and justly, from the intimate social and especially the matrimonial points of view, prefer Europeans to half-castes, and white faces to dark.

So the path of Lieutenant Alec Breckinge was not strewn with roses, and on such roses as he did discover on Life's way, he invariably expected to find, and sometimes did find, a sharp and cruel thorn.

Unlike his father, Mr. Vereker Breckinge, bluff and

hardy of spirit, thick-skinned and tough of temperament, suffering nothing from the slings and arrows of outrageous snobs, Lieutenant Breckinge was morbidly sensitive, thin-skinned to the point of nakedness, against the pin-pricks of hurt, and the cold cutting winds of neglect. Easily wounded, he had a great capacity for suffering, and was a living example of the truth that the ills from which we suffer most are those which never happen to us.

In point of fact, had Breckinge been a little less self-centred, morbid and defensive, he could have got along very comfortably indeed under the protection of his uniform and the ægis of the magnificent Service to which he belonged.

But he who incorrigibly seeks trouble, of whatever kind, invariably finds it ; and there is no more successful search than that for slights, snubs and petty insult.

Little wonder was it that Lieutenant Breckinge grew more and more bitter, and that the abrupt and unhappy termination of his first love-affair turned increasing bitterness, moroseness and malcontent to a mental condition that was extremely unwholesome. His inferiority-complex and his eternal preoccupation with the subject of his colour, developed into a persecution mania, the accompaniment and corollary of which was an acute dislike of the class to which he wished to belong, and a virulent hatred of those members of it whom he believed to despise him.

First and foremost of these was Captain Richard Wendover who, quite innocently and unintentionally, had done him what he considered to be an unforgivable and deadly wrong, and offered him what he imagined to be a mortal insult.

Paradoxically and pathetically enough, it was the fact that the members of the Madrutta Gymkana and the Madrutta Club—far from despising and snubbing him, had admitted him to both these exclusive societies—that led to his undoing. Had he not become a member of the Gymkana he would never have met Annabel Leighton, never have played tennis with her, never have had an opportunity of going for morning rides with her, and never have fallen in love with her. He would have had no opportunity to cultivate and pay his court to her mother, a sprightly matron who, freely admitting that all flesh is grass, was something of a female Nebuchadnezzar, a grass widow when possible, and much addicted to frolicking in green pastures beside still and deep waters.

Had he not been a member of the Madrutta Club, it is improbable that he would have met Annabel's father, Mr. John Leighton, Merchant, Chairman of the Madrutta Chamber of Commerce and President of the Municipality.

Nor would Breckinge have been able to return the Leighton hospitality by giving tea-parties on the Club lawn, and inviting Annabel and her mother thereunto.

Both ladies, in their respective ways, found Breckinge attractive, for he was undeniably handsome in his dark and saturnine way. Mrs. Leighton thought the smouldering passionate fire of his large lucent eyes intriguing; the smile of his weak shapely mouth, with the small, perfect and pearly teeth, beneath the little curling black moustache, attractive; the expression of his olive-tinted melancholy face romantic, yea, Byronic.

But whereas Mrs. Leighton thought his eyes lovely,

his mouth almost kissable, his small well-formed filbert-nailed hands attractive and his whole person and personality what she called exotically and subtly provocative, Annabel, less susceptible and less tolerant, found the young man merely agreeable, useful and tolerable, and that only up to a point.

She declared that, at times, he rather gave her the creeps, and that anyway the said mouldering and passionate eyes were apt to be a lot too warm and the said small and well-formed hands a lot too cold—and clammy.

And these views she communicated to Mrs. Leighton long before Captain Richard Wendover, seconded from his Regiment, came to Madrutta on special duty.

Had Breckinge known this, it is doubtful whether he would have hated Wendover less, or ceased to persuade himself that, intentionally and wilfully, he had “come between” him and the girl he adored, deliberately ruined his romance, and wantonly wrecked his life.

Certainly he would not have hated him less had he realized that Wendover acted as he did, not only with complete indifference to the existing situation, but in utter ignorance both of it and of Breckinge's state of mind.

No, it was another injustice to the Eurasian ; another cruel insult and bitter injury to the poor half-caste, on the part both of Wendover and of Annabel Leighton.

Until Wendover came he was good enough for the girl, worthy to dance and ride and play tennis with her. Now he was only good enough for the mother, the whole of Annabel's thoughts being occupied with the newcomer. She had no time now for Alec Breckinge.

And why ? Simply by reason of the colour of his face. Purely a matter of pigmentation. For did not

Alec Breckinge dance, ride and play tennis as well as Wendover did? Were not his manners as good, his Service and position as good? Was he not as handsome, or a good deal more so?

It was a shame, a cruel, wicked, burning shame, and he'd . . . he'd . . .

What he did do was to sink yet deeper into the slough of despond and bitterness and hatred from which his hitherto-hopeful love had begun to raise him up; to wallow with more abandon in the muck of the bazaar; and to turn ever more frequently to the solace of that Daughter of Delight, Azizun. She, at least, admired him and found no fault with his colour, his kin or his cash. Yes, Azizun knew a gentleman when she saw one, could appreciate an ardent wooer, and could find great uses for one who had one foot in the great world and the other in the half-world—and who was, incidentally, a doctor.

And Captain Richard Wendover, with whom Breckinge came into frequent official and social contact, was undoubtedly casual, and had an undeniably off-hand manner—a manner that could be construed as rude by anyone desiring to do so, and which was, by the rest of his friends, regarded as bluff and cheery, a facet and an indication of that blunt and matter-of-fact character which to them was part of his undeniable charm.

So little indeed did Richard Wendover realize the terrible injury done to the young dark-faced doctor whom he did not dislike, and for whom he was rather sorry, that he would have been utterly amazed had he been informed that the latter's pleasant smile, ingratiating manner and boisterous camaraderie, hid

a sense of wrong and outrage, a fierce hatred, and a burning desire for vengeance of some sort ; something terrible, a vengeance adequate, if that were possible, to the wrong that had provoked it.

Nevertheless, it was with no feeling of particular satisfaction that, a year or so after his transfer from Napierpur to Madrutta, Captain Richard Wendover found himself in the same African outpost with Lieutenant Breckinge, and dependent upon him for the medical care of his company of sepoys ; for social intercourse during the brief hours of relaxation ; and for general support in his dealings with these down-country Indians whom Breckinge understood far better than did Wendover. For he, hitherto, had dealt only with the up-standing, outspoken Pathan and Punjabi Mahommedan, whose general outlook, mentality and characteristics were not very remarkably different from his own.

Things had not been so bad while Hunter-Ward, his second-in-command, was alive ; but from the day that he fell, recklessly exposing himself in defence of the side of the Fort for which he was responsible, Wendover had been increasingly aware of Breckinge's utter inadequacy as a doctor, as a companion, and as a colleague.

While the Mess had consisted of the three of them, talk had been free, natural and easy, though Breckinge had contributed but little to it ; and, thanks to Hunter-Ward's indefatigable ubiquity as second-in-command, Wendover had not quite realized all Breckinge's grave shortcomings.

He realized now that Hunter-Ward, doing as usual all he could to spare his Commanding Officer unneces-

sary bother and worry, must have kept Breckinge up to his work, handled him, used him and driven him, getting the best out of him, without appeal to Wendover.

Moreover, Hunter-Ward, who had spent all his service with this down-country battalion, ever since he left his British Regiment, knew the characters and idiosyncrasies of these sepoys and could manage them with the minimum of friction and maximum of result.

True, Hunter-Ward had from time to time admitted that he neither liked nor trusted the Subedar-Major, and that he felt that somebody had made a very big and bad mistake in ever promoting him beyond the rank of *havildar*; but he had contrived to get on with the man all right, and to prevent his surly and difficult temper from exhibiting itself too plainly.

Personally, Wendover detested the fellow, believed in him even less than Hunter-Ward had done, and had neither the desire nor the patience to manage him as Hunter-Ward, subtle and supple diplomatist, had succeeded in doing. An iron hand within his velvet glove Hunter-Ward had had, but when he considered it advisable, he had worn an extremely thick one.

In dealing with sepoys, Wendover preferred to use the iron hand, with no glove at all. In absolute justice, in easy pleasantness where desirable, and in warm friendship where possible, he believed; but for the type of sepoy or Native Officer of whom careful and tactful handling was necessary, he had no use whatever.

And Wendover's methods, conduct, and character had been thoroughly understood and entirely approved by the up-country stalwarts, chiefly mountaineers, born fighting men, raiders and rievors, who had formed

his Squadron, the leaving of which he would have deeply regretted but for the fact that he was on active service.

And, thank God, he had been able to bring Shere Khan from the Regiment with him.

With these men it was different. They, though fellow-Indians of the men of the Punjab and Frontier Regiments, were as different from them as are Greeks from Prussians or Portuguese from Scotsmen—and they did not like the officer in temporary command of them.

Certain habits and customs which they had always hitherto regarded as rights, were to him abominations, anathema; and, for the first time in their sepoy service, prohibited.

While Hunter-Ward lived, the outpost, isolated like a ship alone on a wide sea, was a not-unhappy ship. After his death, with the Captain in constant and intimate contact with all ranks, it was not a happy ship.

There was an unpleasant spirit abroad.

Not for one moment was it to be described as a mutinous spirit; but a sullen, unwilling, and unfriendly one it was, the attitude of the Subedar-Major being as disagreeable as he dared to make it, and that of his brother and his cousin, one of whom was Subedar and the other, one of the two Jemadars, very similar to it.

Naturally this spirit was reflected by the non-commissioned officers and men; there being cliques among them in which it was better than the company-average, others in which it was worse.

And what troubled and deeply offended Wendover was the obvious fact that Lieutenant Alec Breckinge was hand-in-glove with the least loyal, cheerful, and

willing elements in the garrison ; his particular crony being the Subedar-Major with whom Wendover needed but a fair opportunity and excuse to deal rigorously, even though such action precipitated the trouble that he feared.

Breckinge.

Rotten bad luck that it should be he of all people, and not the usual type of I.M.S. officer, who would have been indefatigable in his care of the men, invaluable as a companion, and priceless as a colleague and a pillar of moral support.

Yes, he would probably have been almost as good as a regular combatant officer, from that point of view—another pair of ears and eyes, and a connecting-file, a lightning-conductor, interpreter, and general liaison-officer between Wendover and these difficult people with whose wretched whims and fancies and requirements and idiosyncrasies he had neither time nor inclination to deal single-handed.

Well, there it was. And as people had always said when he'd defended, not so much Breckinge himself as the fact of Breckinge in gazetted rank, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, nor, conversely, a good pig-skin one out of a piece of silk.

Poor Breckinge couldn't help being what he was—sins of the fathers and all that—but the fact remained that, valuable and admirable a metal as lead may be in its proper uses, you cannot make a blade with it ; or, if you do, you cannot blame it for not being a steel one.

The trouble with this type of people was that, even where the paternal ancestor was a man of breeding, back-bone and character—as in Breckinge's case—the mother was almost invariably of the lowest caste,

generally of almost the lowest human type. And that was bound to tell, breed being breed—whether in human beings or animals.

Of course there were numerous cases of splendid brave brilliant men whose fathers had been European and mothers Asiatic—but their mothers had been women of birth, education and character, who had married their white husbands on equal terms—and had produced sons endowed with the virtues of both races. Notably had this been the case when British Officers had married Afghan or North Indian Mussulman ladies of high rank. But Breckinge—with his sweeper grandmother and low-class Goanese mother. What could one expect?

And there were certain things for which one couldn't blame Breckinge. Nevertheless, you could expect loyalty, and the giving of the best that was in him.

If the fellow were half-English, half-Indian, he needn't exhibit the whole Indian side in the circumstances; needn't hob-nob with the sullen and difficult Subedar-Major (who was probably seditious and would be mutinous if he dared), instead of consorting frankly and freely with his European Commanding Officer who had given him every encouragement to do so.

Far from doing that, he quite definitely avoided him, and moreover, except at meal-times—to call them meals—seemed to contrive to keep out of his way, out of his sight, in fact.

Breckinge. Eurasian.

And here he came with his jaunty swagger and false smile.

CHAPTER II

“GOOD morning, old chap,” smiled Breckinge with uneasy familiarity, showing the perfect pearly teeth of which he was justly proud.

“Morning.”

“How are you feeling?”

“Ill.”

“Oh, bad luck! What’s the matter?”

Wendover raised eyebrows of surprise, and refrained from reply. What would be the matter, in this fever-ridden jungle-hole, but malaria, with a trifle of dysentery and a touch of jaundice and a little weakness due to these things and to starvation? All very well for a native-bred acclimatized doctor, who treated himself prophylactically and was in charge of medical comforts.

“Have you got any calomel?” he asked.

“Oh, yes.”

“I’ll have some, then. And some quinine. Send them over to my *banda*.”

“Right-o, Wendover,” replied Breckinge airily; and, seating himself on a *charpai*,¹ poured out a cup of tea, liberally sweetened it, and enquired:

“No more condensed milk?”

“No, and precious little of anything else . . . I suppose you’ve still got plenty of it for the dysentery cases?”

¹ *Native bed-frame.*

"Er—no. Hardly any left."

"Good Lord! You must have been using it pretty freely."

He had, for it was a comestible of which he was particularly fond, whether in tea, coffee or cocoa; or with boiling water and rum, whisky, gin or brandy. In fact, from childhood's days he had been addicted to the consuming of it neat, straight from the tin.

Wendover glanced at his watch, pulled the end of a lanyard from the breast-pocket of his shirt, and blew a blast upon the whistle that hung at the end of it.

The note was taken up in other parts of the Fort, and shouts of "*Stand to!*" resounded.

Wendover rose to his feet as a tall bearded Indian officer approached, halted, saluted and said in Hindustani:

"*Stand to, Sahib. Sub tyar hai.*"¹

As Wendover returned the native officer's salute, Shere Khan appeared, bearing his tunic and cross-belt. These Wendover donned, that he might be reasonably correctly dressed for the morning inspection of the Stand-to parade.

"Come round with me," he said somewhat curtly to Breckinge, who was lounging off in the direction of his *banda*.

Followed by Breckinge, the Subedar-Major, the Subedar and the Jemadar-Adjutant, Wendover made the round, first of the deep outside trench that enclosed the *boma* and was now occupied by half the force, and then of the Fort wall itself, at each loophole of which stood a sepoy sighting his rifle in the direction of the

¹ *Everything is ready.*

jungle. Here and there, he inspected a rifle, and the contents of a water-bottle.

Thereafter, he visited the hospital, a loathsome pit dug some two feet into the ground and covered by tent-canvas slung across a ridge-pole supported above the hole by posts planted in the ground at the ends of the pit.

"How many sick this morning?" he enquired of Lieutenant Breckinge.

"Oh, about twenty-five," was the reply.

Having visited the cook-house, the sepoys' sleeping-quarters and the store-rooms, he inspected the water-tank and the ammunition store, and then ordered the native officers, with the exception of the Subedar-Major, to return to their posts, dismiss their men, and carry on with the routine of the day. The Subedar-Major he bade accompany him to the Officers' Mess *banda*, intimating to Breckinge that he wished to see him there also, in ten minutes' time.

"Now then, Subedar-Major," said he, when the two men were alone. "There are one or two things I want to speak to you about, and I didn't wish to find fault with you in front of your subordinates. Are you satisfied with the condition of the trenches?"

"*Han*,¹ Sahib," replied the scowling Subedar-Major promptly.

"Oh, you are, are you? Well, I'm not. Nor would you be, if you knew your job and were fit for it."

"What is wrong with them, Sahib?" enquired the native officer, affecting a look of bewilderment.

"I'll tell you to-morrow morning—and in a way you won't like—if you haven't found out by then, and put it right.

"Next thing—the condition of the rifles is not satisfactory. Three of the seven rifles I inspected had not been properly cleaned."

"Sahib, I can't . . ."

"Oh, can't you? Then it won't take me long to find someone who can. Next thing—haven't I told you once, already, to see that every man's water-bottle is full, always? There's not to be a water-bottle in this Fort that isn't full, ever."

"Sahib, I . . ."

"Next thing," interrupted Wendover. "Haven't I told you more than once that all the small canvas water-tanks are always to be full, as well as the water-bottles; and that all water is to be taken from the big tank? I will see that that is kept full; and you are to see that the *chagals* are. How do we know when we may be entirely cut off from the river? Don't let me have to tell you again."

"Next thing—why wasn't Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman on parade?"

The Subedar-Major, who had been studying his feet, looked up sharply.

"Sick, Sahib," he replied. What a *shaitan* was this Wendover Sahib! Fancy missing one man like that.

In point of fact, Dhondoo Lakhsman, by reason of his very prematurely grey beard, one side of which was almost white, the other iron-grey, was a man whose absence any observant officer would have noticed.

"Sick? Then why wasn't he in hospital?"

What a *shaitan* he was! Fancy noting that the man was not in hospital.

"I gave him permission to lie down in his hut."

"Did you? Then why wasn't he doing it? There

was nobody in the sleeping-quarters his Section occupies. Where was he?."

The Subedar-Major shuffled uncomfortably.

"I don't know, Sahib."

"You don't know? Oh! And you don't know why the trenches are littered and untidy; why half the rifles haven't been cleaned since yesterday morning; why all the water-bottles are not filled, nor why the *chagals* are empty? What *do* you know? I'll tell you something you'll know very soon, Subedar-Major Ganga Charan, and that will be that you are under arrest. Go and fetch Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman here immediately."

The Subedar-Major stood, half-turned away, and hung irresolute.

"Go on," snarled Wendover, "you heard what I said. Go and fetch him yourself."

Knowing Indians as he did, he was certain that there was something behind this, something fishy.

Yes, undoubtedly he had stumbled on something. They had taken a chance on his not noticing Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman's absence from parade and hospital. There was nowhere else where he could be, for daily patrols had not yet been sent out, nor day pickets and sentries posted. Besides, had the man been on any sort of fatigue or duty, the Subedar-Major would have said so instantly.

Lieutenant Breckinge approached.

"You wanted to speak to me?" he said.

"I do. And as, at the moment, this *banda* is functioning as Orderly-Room and not as Officers' Mess, you will say 'Sir' when you speak to me."

Lieutenant Breckinge's weakly pleasant face became

strongly unpleasant as he scowled and glanced downward.

"Now then," continued Wendover. "When I asked you this morning how many sick there were, you said '*About twenty-five.*' If you answer me like that again, I shall have something to say to you in front of the men. What do you mean by '*about*'? Is that what you have been in the habit of telling Mr. Hunter-Ward hitherto? When I've done with you, go straight and make me out a proper Sick Statement, a nominal roll, with each man's trouble against his name, and a very brief estimate of his condition.

"Next thing. What are you doing about flies? They are getting worse every day. Hardly push my way through them this morning; and they are worst round the Hospital. What are you doing about it?"

"Flies?" expostulated Breckinge. "What can I do about flies?"

"Good Lord above us, man, are you asking *me*? Aren't you supposed to be a doctor? Do I have to teach you the rudiments of sanitation? How do people deal with flies—people with any knowledge and ability; any initiative and attention to duty? . . . Did you ever hear of burying hospital waste and rubbish; ever hear of muslin, netting, chloride of lime; any . . ."

"I haven't any of those things," protested Breckinge.

"No. And why not? You made out the requisitions, didn't you? Didn't you think any further ahead than quinine, calomel, iodoform and bandages?"

"And medical comforts," he added unpleasantly. "Anyhow, you let me find fewer flies under that awning, and round your hospital premises generally, when I inspect them to-morrow. •

"Next thing. How many times did you visit the hospital last night? Personally, I visited it twice myself, and found no orderly, and nobody in charge. What I did find was one or two men just about dying of thirst. When did you hold a sick-parade last? When did you see that any drinking-water was boiled? When did you issue a quinine ration? When did you inspect trenches, sleeping-quarters, latrines and cooking-places—from the hygienic point of view? When did you do anything except hob-nob familiarly with the Subedar-Major and his gang?"

"Look here, Wendover," began the enraged Breckinge.

"What did you say?" interrupted Wendover softly. "Did I hear you say '*Look here*'? Did I hear you call me *Wendover*? I'll mention again, and for the last time, that, at the present moment, these four posts and that alleged roof are my Orderly-Room, and that you are up before your Commanding Officer for reprimand and admonition, by reason of gross dereliction of duty. Now then, begin again, and instead of saying '*Look here, Wendover*,' say '*Excuse me, Sir*,' if you wish to offer excuses, which doubtless you do."

"I wasn't going to make excuses. I was going to protest."

"Oh? Against what?"

"Your accusing me of hob-nobbing with the men."

"I didn't accuse you of hob-nobbing with the men. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse*. I said the Subedar-Major and his gang. And you know as well as I do who they are. Subedar Gopal Mangal, who is his brother; Jemadar Ganpat Mahadeo, who is his cousin; and Havildar Ramrao Dalkesar, who is his cousin or brother-in-law

or something of the sort ; and the whole of the Section who are his nephews or sons-in-law or cousins of his grandfather's brother's niece's daughter's husband's uncles or aunts or something. If you spent less time with them, and more with your sick, it would be better for all concerned, including yourself and your prospects of promotion. Understand me ? ”

Lieutenant Breckinge looked down at the ground, his hands clenching and unclenching. Raising his eyes, he darted a glance of venomous hatred at his superior officer.

Wendover rose to his feet and resumed his helmet.

“ Well now,” he said in a pleasanter and kindlier voice, “ I’ve said my say, and I hope I shan’t have to talk to you like this again. We’ve all been here a damn sight too long, and we are up against it—but we are all in the same boat. We must pull together. All right Breckinge. Carry on.”

And without a word, Breckinge turned on his heel to depart. As he did so, an idea occurred to Wendover.

“ Oh, by the way,” he said, still speaking as comrade to comrade rather than as Commanding Officer to offending subordinate as he had been doing, “ where’s Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman ? ”

Definitely Breckinge started, and Wendover noted the fact.

Hullo, what was this ? So Breckinge knew something about the mystery of the missing sepoy.

“ How should I know . . . Sir ? ” he asked.

Then why should he look surprised, almost startled, not to say apprehensive ? Obviously he knew something.

“ True. How should you ? That’s where I miss poor Hunter-Ward.”

"Well, there's no man of that name in hospital, nor did he come to me and report sick."

"And beyond that you know nothing and careless, eh, although you and I are the only two . . . European . . . officers here."

Wendover could have bitten his tongue for the pause before the word 'European.' But it had been absolutely involuntary. He had been about to say 'English,' but how could he, with that dark and sullen, that lowering and absolutely Indian, face glowering at him?

To Breckinge it was an intentional and studied insult—and the last straw.

"*European? European?*" he screamed, his eyes blazing, his lips retracted. "Why can't you . . .?"

"That's enough," interrupted Wendover in his quiet compelling voice. "That'll do. Pull yourself together. Go and make out that Sick Statement and let me have it as soon as possible."

And as the Subedar-Major approached, he turned his back on the infuriated doctor who departed, trembling with rage, speechless and angry, almost foaming at the mouth.

"Well?" enquired Wendover of the Subedar-Major.

"Sahib, the man cannot be found," announced the latter.

Wendover eyed him in cold astonishment.

"Are you insane, or do you think I am? What do you mean—cannot be found? Is this Bombay or an outpost, fifty yards by fifty square?"

The Native Officer shuffled uncomfortably beneath his superior's hard and penetrating gaze.

"Look here, what is this *banao*?¹ What's the game? Answer me at once and speak the truth."

¹ *Lie, concocted story.*

"I cannot find him anywhere, Sahib," mumbled the man.

With heavy frown and concentrated stare, Wendover remained silent, well aware that nothing is more disconcerting to the Indian of uneasy conscience, or an easy one, for that matter.

The tense silence grew unbearable—to the Subedar-Major.

"Havildar Ramrao Dalkesar thinks he must have deserted."

"What! In the middle of Africa, and not knowing a word of any language spoken between here and Mombasa? An accomplished thinker, isn't he?"

The man shrugged shoulders and threw out hands of protest, in affected helplessness.

"What do I know?" he growled.

"That's what I intend to find out," was the quiet reply.

"Shere Khan!" he called, and the huge orderly came striding. "Go and find the Jemadar-Adjutant Sahib. Give him my salaams and tell him I want to speak to him here."

A minute later Jemadar Ganpat Mahadeo approached the wall-less mess *banda*, halted, saluted and stood at attention.

"Where are Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman's rifle and accoutrements?"

"Sahib, he is . . ."

"Where are Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman's rifle and accoutrements? I asked," repeated Wendover, in his cold quiet voice, now somewhat hard and menacing.

Evidently the man had expected the question,

"Where is Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman?" and had his answer ready.

"Sahib, they have not been . . . they were . . ."

Silence.

"Well?"

"Sahib, I do not know."

"You do know. You were just going to tell me, and you thought better of it."

Jemadar Ganpat Mahadeo glanced at Subedar-Major Ganga Charan.

"Shere Khan, go and tell Havildar Ramrao Dalkesar to come here at once."

Suddenly Wendover shot a question at the Jemadar-Adjutant.

"What did the Doctor Sahib say when he knew about it?"

The man glanced around him shifty-eyed, anywhere but at Wendover's face, moistened his lips, and then darted a quick look at the Subedar-Major.

"Well, speak up!"

"Sahib, he said nothing."

"H'm! In what language did he say it?"

For a moment the Jemadar's eyes met Wendover's.

"So you told him, did you, and he 'said nothing.' What was it you told him?"

The Jemadar glanced at the Subedar-Major. This was a question for him to answer.

"No, you needn't look at the Subedar-Major," observed Wendover, "and you needn't answer. I have just had a long talk with the Doctor Sahib about it, and I wanted to see whether you'd speak the truth."

That was the only way to get anything out of these people. Play their own game, distasteful as it might be.

Damn Breckinge—once again—for putting him in the position of having to take this line at all. If only he had been a white man—in both senses of the term !

Shepherded by the gigantic Share Khan, the sepoy Sergeant approached, saluted, and stood outside the *banda*.

“ Where are Sepoy Dhondoo I akhsman’s rifle and kit ? ” asked Wendover, briefly returning the salute. “ The Subedar-Major Sahib and the Jemadar Sahib say that you . . . ”

Wendover paused to encourage the protest that he knew would almost instantly break forth.

“ Sahib, it was not my fault ! They have not been recovered. They are lost. It was not my fault. I know nothing.”

“ What steps did you take to recover them ? ” asked Wendover quickly.

What the devil was this ? It looked as though he was going to find foothold in this morass of lies and deceit.

“ Sahib, the river is swift and strong and the water deep. What could we do ? ”

And suddenly Wendover saw daylight. Saw also a tragic little scene as clearly as though the drama had been enacted before his eyes. . . .

A tiny entrenched stockaded picket-post on the other side of the treacherous swiftly-flowing Ubele River ; the sound of the Retreat bugle blown in the Fort at sunset ; a local *shenzi*,¹ hired or intimidated for the purpose, waiting to pull the long keel-less, narrow and terribly unstable, one-man dug-out across, with its precariously-balanced cargo of a clumsy sepoy in full marching order, with rifle and kit.

¹ *Savage ; jungle native ; uncivilized negro.*

Slowly, painfully, anxiously, the dug-out, at an ever-increasing angle, the rope almost torn from the negro ferryman's grasp, is pulled across, and the sepoy thankfully scrambles up the bank. The brawny naked negro who has been paying out a rope attached to the other end of the dug-out, now hauls it back to the opposite bank, and another sepoy, unhandy and awkward, laden like a beast of burden and encumbered with his rifle, unhappily crawls into it, while the clumsy hollowed tree-trunk, its roughly-shaped sides but an inch above the swirling water, rocks, with the exasperating devilishness of something as sentient as malicious, to every movement of the nervous occupant.

At length it is reasonably still and steady, and the passage perilous begins, the rope at the bow taut, the rope at the stern trailing loose, for the least tightening of that, to help prevent the canoe from being carried down with the stream, would cause a surge of water instantly to flow over the side and swamp the crazy craft.

After two or three of his men have crossed safely, the Native Officer ventures, satisfied that the rope is dependable and that the ferryman has got his eye in.

The Native Officer, unencumbered by pack, haversack, ground-sheet, water-bottle, bandolier, entrenching-tool, bayonet and rifle, or any other impedimenta, makes a quicker, easier and safer crossing.

The black Hercules on the other side pulls the empty dug-out back, and another sepoy, Dhondoo Lakhsmán this time, his eyes, his whole expression, showing the fear that bemuses and weakens him, steps into the bobbing unstable travesty of a boat, while the negro desperately clutches its sides.

Like a bullock boarding a racing-skiff, Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman clatters into the dug-out, seizes its sides and kneels down.

Had the fool but lain down, he might have been saved.

With a cluck of his tongue, the *shenzi* lets go and picks up the trailing tow-rope while his opposite number hauls mightily. For a minute all goes well; and then, by reason of some change of position, some clumsy movement on the part of Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman, there is a lurch, a swirl, a splash, a shout, as the dug-out rolls over, half-fills and rights itself, and the laden sepoy disappears beneath the surface of the swirling muddy river.

Not the strongest swimmer in the stillest and most buoyant water could have swum any distance, weighted and hampered as was this unfortunate.

Not the strongest swimmer, though he were naked, could have swum against, or across, that current, or done anything but keep his head above water as he was swirled downward to the rapids and waterfall, where he would be dashed to pieces.

Wendover saw it all, the more clearly by reason of the fact that it was against this very contingency that he had issued stringent instructions.

"Dismiss," said he to Havildar Ramrao Dalkestar.

"You may go," he added, addressing the Jemadar-Adjutant, ere he turned upon the Subedar-Major, the whites of whose eyes now seemed larger, more noticeable than hitherto they had been.

"So that's it, is it?" he said, his voice quieter than ever, and yet more cutting, more sinister and menacing. "You know nothing, do you? Then I'll tell you something. You flatly and flagrantly and impudently

disobeyed my most clear, definite and emphatic orders that the river was only to be crossed by the secret upstream bridge!

"Why did I have the tree-trunk-and-rope bridge made for crossing the river? For amusement, do you suppose? Why did I absolutely prohibit the crossing of the Ubele River by dug-out canoe, except in a case of the greatest emergency, such as an attack?"

"Simply because I knew that precisely this would happen, if sepoys used that dug-out canoe."

"And whatever my reasons were, what are you here for, except to carry out my orders?"

Again the Subedar-Major looked at the ground and shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Well?"

The man maintained a sullen silence.

"Now then, repeat to me the orders I gave you about the relief of the river-picket. Go on, get on with it. I've something better to do than . . ."

"Sir, you are knowing well what you . . ."

"Don't you talk English to me! Tell me what your orders were."

Silence.

What could he do with the fellow? What he would have liked to do would have been to knock him down, for his present sulky half-veiled insolence, and for the gross dereliction of duty, nay, the flat disobedience of orders, which had led to the death of a sepoy—not to mention the undermining of authority and lessening of the bonds of discipline by reason of the fact that every man in the outpost knew what the orders were.

What could he do, if the man refused to answer

him, beyond putting him under open arrest and telling him what would happen to him if, and when, the outpost was relieved, the Company rejoined its Battalion, and he could accuse him to his Colonel and demand a Court-Martial.

How could he put him under close arrest here, when his services were so badly needed that he should have been indispensable ; when his subordinates were not only in sympathy but hand-in-glove with him ; when his influence with most of the men was all-powerful ; and when, in point of practical detail, there was nowhere to confine him and no facilities or personnel for holding a proper Field General Court-Martial ?

But he'd get the beggar. He'd get him all right. And meanwhile he'd show him who commanded Ubele Fort ; and whether Captain Richard Wendover's orders were going to be disobeyed with impunity.

Meanwhile, if the brute would not repeat the orders, he'd better make him commit himself. Ordeal by question.

" Well, first of all, why did I put that picket beyond the river ? "

" To command the path leading down to it," growled the Subedar-Major.

" Yes. The only jungle-path in hundreds of square miles leading down to a place where there is a ford in the dry season. Sited where the path makes a right-angle in impenetrable jungle.

" And what were the orders in case of a large enemy party being seen by the sentry posted at the farthest point within sight of the picket ? "

" Alarm to be given by volley-firing."

" Yes. And then ? "

"Sentry group to retreat, one by one, crossing by means of the dug-out canoe."

"Yes?"

"Havildar or *naik* in charge to retreat along the river-bank, and cross by the rope-and-pole bridge."

"Yes?"

"They and the bridge-sentry were then to pull it across to this side."

"Yes? And except in case of emergency what were the standing orders? How was the sentry-group *always* to leave the picket?"

"March along the river-bank and cross by the bridge."

"Yes, *always*! And what were *your* orders about the picket?"

"Personally to see it relieved every night."

"Yes. Exactly. I ordered you, as senior Native Officer, and now Second-in-Command here, to see that those orders were carried out. Actually to visit the picket yourself every evening at Retreat. To see that it was evacuated in the way I directed; and that the men crossed by the bridge and in no other way. Also to see that the night picket was mounted on this side of the bridge; that nobody ever crossed by boat, and that the dug-out, the only craft in this part of the world, was always kept on this side.

"Those were the orders, weren't they?"

"*Han, Sahib.*"

"And the fact that you carried them out until last night—so far as I know—shows that you understood them. Now then. Did you go yourself every night?"

And before the man could reply, Wendover answered his own question.

"No, you know you didn't. You sent Jemadar Rama Narayen or Jemadar Ganpat Mahadeo instead. You yourself went last night—and were too lazy to march a couple of miles, weren't you?"

The man shot an angry glare at Wendover, and began a protest.

"Too lazy. Too lacking in sense of duty, discipline and efficiency."

"Sahib, I . . ."

"Keep what you have to say for a Court-Martial. You are utterly unfit for your rank; unreliable and untrustworthy; a dishonest shirker. Through your laziness, misconduct, disobedience, a good man has been lost, and the garrison weakened, when every rifle counts. You are a disgrace to your Regiment."

The Native Officer's eyes blazed.

"And as soon as this post is relieved and we return to Headquarters, I'll have you put under arrest, and you shall stand your trial for causing the death of one of your men through deliberate disobedience and defiance of orders.

"*Shere Khan!*" he called, "give my salaams to the Doctor Sahib, and ask him to come and speak to me again here."

The Subedar-Major and Breckinge should have no opportunity for collusion until he had had another talk with the latter.

As Breckinge approached the Mess *banda*, Wendover again told the Subedar-Major that he might go. As he did so, the man cast a long and meaning look at Breckinge while they passed each other.

"I've been hearing things!" said Wendover, in a very significant tone of voice, as soon as the Native

Officer was out of ear-shot ; and awaited Breckinge's reply.

Receiving none, he continued :

" Tell me, Breckinge ; why on earth did you want to pretend you knew nothing about what had happened to Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman ? "

" I didn't say I knew nothing about it."

" I'm not talking about what you said, I'm talking about pretending. You deliberately gave me to understand that you didn't know what had happened to him."

" It's not my fault if you misunderstand what . . ."

" Don't talk rubbish. And don't wriggle and twist. Why can't you be straightforward ? I distinctly remember saying to you '*Where's Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman ?*' and your replying '*How should I know ?*' What's that but giving me to understand that you didn't know what had happened to him ? "

" It was no part of my duty to . . ."

" Look here, suppose you think less about what's 'part' of your duty and make *everything* your duty. Everything that will help, I mean. I know you are not a combatant Officer, and I am not going to ask you to use a rifle or take command of part of the defence if we are attacked again—though there are men in your service who would not need asking . . . But what I do say is—that you surely might do everything else in your power to assist in the defence of this post. That's what you are here for, isn't it ? "

" I'm a doctor . . ."

" Yes," interrupted Wendover, " although at times one would not think it. You are a doctor, and you are here to assist in the defence of this post, primarily

by looking after the health of the men. But I don't know that it is laid down in Regulations that you are forbidden to do everything in your power to help in other ways. Why didn't you tell me that Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman had been drowned?"

"It was no part of my duty to come and report to you that . . ."

"No part of your duty to come and report to me that one of the men was dead? Supposing for one moment that it were not, is it 'part of your duty' to pretend you know nothing about it when I ask you?"

"It was Subedar-Major Ganga Charan's business, not mine. I didn't wish to get him into trouble by . . ."

"Look here. Is your first duty to Subedar-Major Ganga Charan or to me? Even supposing your delicate conscience and high sense of duty prevented you even mentioning it, much less reporting it, why should you deny knowing anything about it?"

"I didn't deny it, I . . ."

"Oh, for God's sake, don't start that prevarication again. What sort of a reply is '*How should I know?*' but a negative? Now then, tell me all you know about it."

"The Subedar-Major can do that better than . . ."

"Don't I make myself clear? I ordered you to tell me all that you know about it."

"I only know what I was told."

"And so do I. And so will the Court-Martial. For the third and, I hope for your sake, last time—will you tell me what you know about the death of Sepoy Dhondoo Lakhsman."

"The Subedar-Major went to relieve the rifle-picket as usual . . ."

"Yes, 'as usual'!" prompted Wendover with a sarcastic inflection in his voice.

". . . and on this occasion, for some reason, gave orders for the sentry-group to cross by means of the dug-out canoe."

"Yes, in spite of strict and explicit orders that this was never to be done."

"Possibly he thought the manoeuvre ought to be practised."

"And possibly, having walked a mile, he was too world-weary to walk back again. However, go on."

"And the last man coming over was upset and drowned."

"And you didn't think it worth mentioning to me. But you *did* think your knowledge of the matter worth denying."

To this Breckinge made no reply.

"Very interesting. Now, what is even more interesting is this. The Subedar-Major, whose duty it was, as you rightly say, immediately to report the matter to me, failed to do so. Not only that, but when, to his great surprise, I missed that particular sepoy, he went one better than you did. He didn't say '*How do I know?*' He didn't even say that he didn't know. He actually said the man was sick! When I asked why he wasn't in hospital, he said he had given him permission to lie down on his ground-sheet. When I pointed out that there was nobody lying down in his Section's sleeping-quarters, he said that, that being so, he didn't know where he was!"

"Well, I am not responsible for what he said to you," growled Breckinge insolently.

"No, but the interesting point, the point I'm getting

at, is what he said to you, or rather, why he should have said it to *you*. You pretended to be very upset, just now, because I accused you of hob-nobbing with him and his crew. But doesn't it look as though that is just about the state of affairs—since you know all about this matter, whereas I am told nothing at all? Why should *you* know all about it? Queer, isn't it?"

To this Breckinge made no reply beyond a sullen scowl.

"It will all sound a bit queer at the Court-Martial, won't it?" continued Wendover. "For I will certainly make no secret of the fact that there was something uncommonly like collusion between you and him to conceal a piece of absolutely criminal disobedience, indiscipline, and . . ."

"It was no business of mine. The orders he gave to the picket were nothing to do with . . ."

"And the reporting of the death of one of my men was nothing to do with you either, eh? The concealing of the fact was a part of your duty, eh? It was quite in order for you to reply '*How do I know?*' when I asked you the definite question. Well, we'll see what the Court-Martial thinks about it."

"I don't see that I . . . I don't think I . . ."

"No. Well, you'd better do a bit of pretty hard thinking. You'd better try to think up something to explain away what looks uncommonly like being an accessory; conspiring with a Native Officer to hide both the fact and the cause of the death of one of the men in your medical charge; being in collusion with a Native Officer deliberately to deceive me with a suggestion that a man had deserted with his kit, an excellent man whose death . . ."

A sentry shouted and fired his rifle.

Instantly Wendover pulled the whistle from his pocket and blew a long blast as he ran from the *banda* shouting "*Stand to !*" at the top of his voice. Whistles were loudly blown in all directions, and the cry of "*Stand to !*" repeated.

Snatching rifles and bandoliers, sepoy's rushed from cooking-fires, washing-troughs and sleeping-quarters, to man the loop-holes.

For the whole of that day the outpost was besieged, a steady fire being maintained upon its walls from hidden riflemen posted behind tree-trunks and in tree-tops ; and for the whole of the following night Wendover patrolled its walls and trenches, visiting sentries, and doing all that courage, ability and devotion could, to strengthen and hearten its defence.

At dawn, the enemy again attacked the post from all four sides ; but after a heavy fusillade, to which the garrison replied with vigour and effect, drew off, and a great peace fell upon the brooding jungle and exhausted Fort.

After doing all he could, and taking every precaution of which he could think, Wendover retired to his hut, ate a small portion of a stew of tough and disgusting bully beef which he decided had been left over, and returned to store, after the Boer War, treated himself to a stiff whisky-and-sparklet, and having given Shere Khan strict orders to wake him in a couple of hours' time, lay down for long over-due and much-needed sleep.

CHAPTER III

ONE morning a week later, the distant sound of gun-fire roused the hopes and revived the drooping spirits of the garrison of the Ubele outpost. And the same evening the *shen-isi* who haunted the ford and owned the dug-out canoe informed a Swahili stretcher-bearer, formerly an askari of the King's African Rifles, that there had been a battle in which the latter had been victorious.

In the amazing way in which news does travel by *lokali*¹ and other means through the African jungle, further rumour reached the Ubele outpost. It was said that there were movements both to the North and South, and that relief would soon arrive.

What did arrive, next day, was a messenger announcing that a convoy and reinforcements had been despatched; that it would arrive the following morning; that it would be quickly followed by a strong column; that the Ubele post would be relieved; and that the survivors of its present garrison would be evacuated to the Base for rest and recuperation.

This message, typed on a small sheet of paper, was brought by a negro runner, a bold and intelligent fellow, one Marbrouk bin Suliman, who had been gun-boy to more than one mighty hunter in piping times of peace, and hoped to be so again when the war was o'er.

¹ *Message-drums.*

Having been bidden, by the Intelligence Officer who employed him, to carry it carefully and see that it arrived safely, he had cut himself a coconut, hacked off its thick green rind, bored a hole in its shell, poured out the milk, rolled the message up till it resembled a cigarette, poked it through the hole and closed the aperture with clay. Should any inquisitive and interfering person stop him on his hundred-mile journey, he would be a humble *shenzi*, devoid of all possessions save a coconut, his poor provision for the morrow.

Having reached Ubele outpost and advanced cautiously into the open with his hands above his head, the one bearing the coconut and the other the branch of a tree in token of peaceful intent—an olive-branch, in fact—he was challenged by the sentry over the narrow and tortuous entrance to the *boma*, and bidden to halt.

In reply to the sepoy's "*Harlt! Who com dar?*" Marbrouk bin Suliman replied in Swahili and then in Mission School English, to the effect that he had a message for the *Bwana Macouba*.

The sentry called the Havildar of the Guard, in whose presence Marbrouk smashed the coconut and extracted the slightly damp but undamaged paper.

This the Havildar immediately sent to Wendover's *banda*, at the entrance of which the huge Pathan orderly, Shere Khan, formerly a *sowar* in Napier's Horse, squatted on his heels, cleaning and oiling his Sahib's clean and oily revolver.

"Get to Hell out of this, pig; for the Presence sleepeth," said he in Pushtu to the Hindu sepoy who carried the paper. His meaning was abundantly clear to the Hindustani-speaking sepoy.

Returning to the guard-hut, the man informed the Havildar that the Presence slept.

"Then take it to the Doctor Sahib," ordered the Havildar, anxious only for the avoidance of responsibility.

And to Breckinge the sepoy carried the message.

Twice and thrice Breckinge read it ; thought awhile ; stared before him for a minute, saying nothing ; moistened his lips ; smiled ; and, taking an indelible pencil from his pocket, wrote on the back of the paper :

"Received, noted, and returned. A. Breckinge, Lt. I.M.S.," adding the word Ubele and the date.

"Look you," said he to the sepoy, "give this to the messenger, tell him to run quickly back and give it to the Colonel Sahib. Or perhaps you'd better bring him here to me."

And to Lieutenant Breckinge the sepoy brought Marbrouk bin Suliman, to whom, in very halting Swahili, in Hindustani and pidgin-English, Breckinge made it clear that the answer was as important as the message itself, and must, without fail and without loss of time, be taken back to the Base Camp. Particularly was the messenger to note that, should he meet a force on the way from the base to Ubele, the answer was to be shewn to the *Bwana* in command, before being taken on to the Base Camp.

"Very good, *Bwana*. I am running all the way," replied Marbrouk bin Suliman, saluting and showing magnificent teeth in a broad grin. And, turning upon his heel, he started forthwith upon his hundred-mile return journey.

Alec Breckinge, having sat awhile in thought, arose and went in search of Subedar-Major Ganga

Charan. With this worthy he colloqued for an hour ; propounded to him a great, glowing and splendid idea ; and with him came to what they considered a most satisfactory understanding, agreement and arrangement.

§ 2

Colonel Maldon was puzzled.

Obviously the messenger, bearing a book ¹ wedged into a cleft stick, had come from Ubele ; and the message was genuine. There could be no doubt that the man was speaking the simple truth when he said he had taken this ' book ' to Ubele inside a coconut, as he did not know whether the way was clear and safe ; that it had been read and signed by a black-faced *Bwana* who had told him to return with it and show it to the *Bwana* commanding any troops he might meet coming from Butindi to Ubele.

But why hadn't Wendover signed it ?

And if he had been killed, why hadn't Breckinge mentioned the fact ? There was plenty of room for him to have written a few words on the subject. '

All very curious.

Again he questioned Marbrouk bin Suliman, but received no enlightenment. The man had evidently been challenged by a sentry, taken to the guard-hut, kept there until he had been sent for by Breckinge ; and he had been told by Breckinge to return with the answer that he had written on the back.

Had he seen no other *Bwana* ; no—er—white-faced *Bwana* ?

¹ All letters are known as ' books ' to the natives of East Africa.

No, only the black-faced *Bwana* who had written the 'book'.

From what the man said, Ubele outpost was obviously all right.

But apparently Lieutenant Breckinge, I.M.S., was in command.

And it was undoubtedly queer that he had not, at any rate, jotted down after his name,

"*For Captain Wendover, wounded,*" or sick, or something of that sort.

Presumably, if Wendover had been killed, Breckinge would have signed himself as,

"*Acting O.C. Ubele,*" if he didn't choose to state the fact in plain English that Wendover was dead. Perhaps he had some funny idea that the message might fall into enemy hands, and that there was no need to give them the information.

But that was absurd, as the messenger who had at that moment reached Ubele had just come unmolested through unoccupied country with the news of the advance and the information that the way between Butindi and Ubele was clear.

Well, he'd know soon enough, for they'd reach the place at dawn, as promised; and no doubt Wendover would come out with a patrol, and meet the relieving force.

And of course, Wendover might have been out on a patrol when the messenger reached Ubele; and this fellow Breckinge might have taken it upon him to sign the chit and return it without waiting for Wendover to come back—especially if he were out on a whole day's reconnaissance.

That wasn't likely, though.

No, Wendover would have sent out an officer's patrol under a Subedar.

Queer.

Next morning, according to plan and schedule, the relieving force, under Colonel Maldon, reached Ubele.

And as, riding the mule—to the use of which for a charger, the ravages of the *tsetse* fly had reduced him—Colonel Maldon, at the head of a long snake-like column, debouched from the jungle into the clearing, he noted that it was not Captain Richard Wendover, typical British Officer, who was coming forth to meet him, but a swarthy-faced man, dark as an Indian, whose tunic, donned for the occasion, bore the black tabs of the Indian Medical Service.

“ Good morning. Where's Wendover ? ” he asked, dismounting from his mule and returning the Medical Officer's salute. “ Not wounded, I hope ? ”

Breckinge looked uncomfortable and glanced away.

“ Not been killed ? ”

“ Oh, no, Sir. No.”

“ Sick ? ”

Again Breckinge looked away from Colonel Maldon's face, in apparent embarrassment.

“ Damn it all, man ! ” snapped the Colonel. “ Can't you answer a plain question ? Where's Captain Wendover ? ”

There was a moment's silence ; and as the Colonel opened his mouth for the utterance of one of the remarkable ejaculations and tirades for which he was famous,

“ He's lying down,” said Breckinge.

"Lying down? Lying down? What the devil do you mean? Is he ill?"

"No, Sir. He's not ill."

"What then?"

"He's . . . asleep."

"*Asleep!* At ten o'clock in the morning! But wasn't he expecting me? Didn't he get my message? I sent a man on, a couple of hours ago."

"Yes, Sir. We had the information yesterday, saying you'd arrive this morning; and your own messenger arrived just after *reveille* this morning."

"Well?"

"Captain Wendover was asleep when the messenger arrived yesterday. And he was still asleep this morning."

Colonel Maldon did then utter one of his private personal and peculiar ejaculations.

"But confound it all," he added, "he isn't a Damned Dormouse, is he? Not a Blasted Bee hibernating, is he?"

Breckinge remained silent.

"I say! He hasn't got sleeping sickness, has he?" enquired Colonel Maldon, with real concern in his voice. "No, you said he wasn't sick," he added.

"No, Sir, he's not sick."

"What then?"

"You'd better come and have a look at him, Sir."

By this time, Colonel Maldon and Breckinge had passed the arms-presenting guard and entered the *boma*.

"This way, Sir," said Breckinge, and led the Colonel to Wendover's doorless *banda*.

Colonel Maldon looked inside the hut.

On a folding canvas camp-bed, furnished with a dirty khaki sheet and khaki-covered pillow, lay Captain Richard Wendover, breathing stertorously. Beside him was an almost-empty uncorked whisky-bottle, some of the contents of which had run over his clothing and the frowsy bed.

On the small folding camp-table, beside the bed, stood another whisky-bottle, empty; and on the mud floor beside it, lay a tin mug.

A squalid and unpleasant sight.

To the fastidious eye of Colonel Maldon, military martinet, a most disgusting scene; incredible; an unshaven tousled officer in crumpled filthy clothing on a whisky-sodden bed, snoring open-mouthed.

Drunk.

A man among whose many virtues patience was not the most prominent, the Colonel seized Wendover's arm and shook him violently, pulled him into a sitting position, bawled loud and lurid exhortations in his ear, and then let him fall back limp, inert and senseless on the filthy bed.

For a long minute he stared at the unconscious officer, his face expressive of mingled contempt, disgust and sorrow.

"Good God!" he breathed. "Drunk as David's sow!" and retired from the stinking hut.

So that was it.

"How long has he been like this?" he asked.

"On this occasion, Sir? Oh, about twenty-four hours," replied Breckinge.

"Let your men dismiss; and bring me the Subedar-Major and the other native officers," ordered Colonel Maldon.

CHAPTER IV

AT the Court-Martial—consisting of Lieutenant-Colonel Matheson of The King's African Rifles ; Major Bonnington, R.E. ; Major Hawley of the R.F.A. ; Captain Marvin and Captain Brace of the Twentieth Bombay Infantry—Lieutenant Breckinge did his painful duty with evident reluctance. Nevertheless it was most utterly damning—and completely unshakeable under cross-examination.

Captain Wendover had kept strict personal charge of the ration whisky. Before the death of Lieutenant Hunter-Ward, things had not been so bad. This officer had acted as Quarter-Master, and all stores, including ration whisky, had been in his charge.

And although there had always been a bottle of whisky in Captain Wendover's *banda*, it could not be said that the latter had ever been patently the worse for drink. Not what a liberal-minded reasonable man-of-the-world would call really drunk. He had drunk whisky at dinner, to call it such, in the Mess *banda* ; and as Captain Wendover, Lieutenant Hunter-Ward and Lieutenant Breckinge had sat round the table after mess, Captain Wendover had continued to drink whisky. Lieutenant Hunter-Ward had always confined himself to one whisky-and-sparklet at dinner.

Lieutenant Breckinge himself was a teetotaller.

When, on various occasions, witness had had reason

to go to Captain Wendover's *banda* during the night, there had always been a whisky-bottle and a mug on the table beside his camp-bed. He had rather gathered the impression that Captain Wendover drank it neat. At night-time, that is to say. Probably it helped him to sleep. He had never seen the sparklet-syphon in his *banda*.

No, up to that time witness had never seen him what might be called really intoxicated ; completely drunk.

Of that he was quite sure.

But after the death of Lieutenant Hunter-Ward, Captain Wendover had himself taken charge of stores and acted as Quarter-Master—possibly because there was no other European combatant Officer, and he did not trust his Native Officers. Though why this should have been the case, witness did not know.

It was from then onward that things had got so bad, and had rapidly gone from bad to worse.

Undoubtedly Captain Wendover drank alone in his *banda*, drank continually, drank to excess, was always more or less drunk, and at night quite definitely so.

It had made things very difficult for Lieutenant Breckinge, to whom the Native Officers, from time to time, had appealed for assistance and advice, in spite of the fact that he was not a combatant Officer. He had done his best ; had tried to shield Captain Wendover ; to explain away his misconduct ; and to foster the belief that his incredible behaviour was due to illness, fever, heat-stroke—that sort of thing.

In point of fact, witness had had a very bad time indeed ; and, even early in the morning, Captain Wendover would be quite irresponsible ; labouring

under delusions ; violent-tempered ; as intemperate in speech as in habits ; and most insulting.

Twice witness had gone to prisoner's *banda* at night and had found it quite impossible to wake him up. Nor, to a doctor, did it need the evidence of the empty whisky-bottle, still clutched in Captain Wendover's hand, to show the reason for this.

In fact, the questions, both of the prosecuting and defending officers, merely served to bear out the plain, clear, and simple statement of Colonel Maldon as to the state of affairs he had discovered on reaching the Ubele outpost.

The reluctance of Subedar-Major Ganga Charan was not quite so apparent.

That there should be a Court-Martial, Captain Richard Wendover had promised, and a Court-Martial indeed there was ! But not upon the excellent Subedar-Major Ganga Charan. Oh, no ! Far otherwise had the Gods of Ind ordained.

What a truly colossal jest ! And gloriously subtle as it was colossal. Rightly indeed had the Subedar-Major had his caste-mark painted on his forehead by the holiest of Brahmins, a grain of rice securely adhering in the middle of it.

A Court-Martial indeed ! And on the tyrannical, over-bearing, fault-finding, *zubbardusti* Sahib who had threatened to Court-Martial and break him ; *him*, Subedar-Major Ganga Charan.

Here was *zulm* rightly punished !

Yes, he swore under cross-examination ; all had indeed been as the Doctor Sahib had stated in evidence.

And worse. Many times, when the Subedar-Major had gone to the Captain Sahib to make report, he had found him *matwala*, violent, noisy, abusive; not only unwilling to listen to a word the Subedar-Major had to say, but quite unable to understand it when he did say it. *Bé-hosh anr bé-ukl* with *sherab*; drunk with whisky.

It was a dreadful pity, for at other times, when sober, he had been a very good officer, and it had been a pleasure to be under his kind control, though of course it wasn't like being under one's own proper officer, whom one knew, and who always treated one correctly.

Young Captain Brace, just promoted, and so the junior officer of the Court-Martial, was much impressed by the reluctant evidence of this dignified Native Officer, in whom a strong sense of duty seemed to struggle with the desire to say as little as possible that would be damaging to the accused.

Captain Brace found the whole business extremely painful; and, while pitying Captain Wendover in his terrible plight, could scarcely repress the indignation that he felt against a responsible British Officer who could put himself in such a position that the evidence of Indian officers and sepoys had to be taken concerning his conduct.

However, pity was all very well; but it was a shameful and disgraceful thing, utterly unpardonable, that a British Officer should be found blind drunk when in command of a post.

Bad enough at any time, but bad beyond words in time of war and in the presence of Indian troops, not to mention the presence of the enemy. For the

post had been under fire not many hours before, and might have been again, at any moment. A nice thing if the place had been attacked while its Commanding Officer lay on his bed in his hut, blind to the world.

He didn't wish to be priggish, narrow-minded or censorious, but . . .

Personally, he wasn't a teetotaler, but . . .

And, of course, it must have been drink, though the man most certainly did not look a drunkard, nor even an habitual user of alcohol in fairish moderation. Could it possibly be something else? One of those sad cases of the use of some such muck as hashish or opium? Well, if so, that was as bad as drink or worse. Yes, much worse. More cold-blooded and deliberate. Or could it have been an attempt at suicide with some sort of sleeping-draught? A case like that of the wounded doctor whom he had seen . . . But why should Wendover commit suicide when relief was at hand? Out of his mind with strain and anxiety? No—not that sort of chap at all.

Awful tragedy. And the evidence left no possibility of doubt. This Subedar-Major evidently hated the way he had been let down—and who should blame him?

Yes, Subedar-Major Ganga Charan made a very good impression upon him, and by no means an unfavourable one upon the other members of the Court-Martial, though the President, Colonel Matheson, seemed disposed to question him at some length.

Nor did the evidence of Subedar Gopal Mangal materially differ from that of his brother-in-law, the Subedar-Major.

It would, indeed, have been remarkable if it had

done so, in view of the fact that the two officers understood each other (and the position) very thoroughly, and had spent no little time in discussing the matter together—and again with Jemadar Rama Narayen, who was the Subedar-Major's cousin, and Jemadar Ganpat Mahadeo, who was the cousin of Jemadar Rama Narayen.

Jemadar Rama Narayen, it appeared, had also found Captain Wendover a good and kindly officer, save when—well—when he was 'under the influence,' so to speak; when he had the bottle of *sherab* at his elbow. Then was he indeed filled with the spirit of *zubberdust* and *zulm*; harsh, oppressive, and insulting; very *sakht*, and quite unjust. At other times also, when he had been drinking, he was without sense or understanding; stupid, and liable to give absurd and impossible orders; and, to respectful questions, absurd and impossible answers.

Upon Captain Brace, Jemadar Rama Narayen also made a very favourable impression, heightening his indignation against the wretched drunkard, who seemed to have done his best to lower the whole standard of prestige of the British Officer, in the eyes of those grave, responsible and experienced men.

Subedar Gopal Mangal, brother of the Subedar-Major, questioned by the prosecution, also gave chapter and verse, instance and example, of extremely peculiar behaviour on the part of Captain Wendover. He had received shameful and face-blackening abuse from him; and had been witness of painful and somewhat disgraceful scenes in which his superior officers had been involved with the Captain Sahib.

Jemadar Ganpat Mahadeo gave evidence of how,

once, the Captain Sahib had threatened to strike him, and had appeared to be about to do so. On cross-examination it was elicited from this witness that on the occasion to which he referred, the Captain Sahib had shouted at him, clenched his fist and shaken it in his face.

This painful event had been witnessed by Havildar Ramrao Dalakesar. Most clearly he remembered it. Who could forget such a thing? He had thought at the time that the Captain Sahib had gone mad, so red was his face, so thick his utterance; but when he had gone off with uncertain and staggering gait, the Havildar had been forced reluctantly to modify his opinion.

Nor, unfortunately, was the evidence of certain sepoy's different from that of their officers, or to be in anywise shaken by the cross-examination of the officer in charge of the defence.

Perhaps the testimony of the nondescript creature who cooked—or failed to cook—food for the Captain Sahib, was not regarded as being of much value, though he swore upon the Koran that it was that gentleman's habit to call him most evil names; to assault him violently in the rear every time he turned his back to leave his presence; and daily to threaten to seat him firmly on his own cooking-fire. He had gone in terror of the officer when that cruel and terrible man was under the influence of the Forbidden Drink. When quite sober he had been no worse than the other *Bwanas* who had employed deponent.

In point of fact, the sole witness who might have been of any help to the officer detailed for the defence, was the accused's orderly, Sher-e-Khan; and more than

one member of the Court listened to his testimony with a hidden smile. Such was the vehemence and truculence of this witness, that with a glance at Major Bonnington, the President murmured "Save us from our friends." For Shere Khan, ere he could be checked and sharply reprimanded, declared that the Doctor Sahib was a black-faced liar, and the Hindoo Native Officers and sepoys were pigs—and worse than pigs—for they were simply Hindoos.

When reduced to glowering silence and bidden by the President to answer the questions that were put to him and refrain from offending the ears of the Court with a statement of his outrageous opinions, he did so with a superfluity of zeal.

According to Shere Khan, the Captain Sahib never drank whisky at all. Shere Khan had never seen a whisky-bottle in the Captain Sahib's *banda*. He had never come into the *banda* and found the Captain Sahib asleep. In reply to the Judge Advocate's question as to whether he had ever found the accused sleeping so soundly that he had been unable to wake him, he was not content with denying this, but added a statement of his firm belief that the Captain Sahib never slept at all. Anyhow, he had never seen him sleeping.

When cross-examined on the subject of the accused Officer's threatening, abusive, and insulting speech when addressing witnesses, he roundly swore that nothing of the sort had ever taken place in his presence or hearing. And this in spite of the fact that Lieutenant Breckinge and Subedar-Major Ganga Charan stated that he had been present on one particularly and peculiarly painful occasion, and had, moreover, actually been the

messenger who had fetched them from their respective posts to the Mess *banda* where Captain Wendover awaited them, and where the incident took place.

And then as to the allegation of Sepoy Arjun Atmaran that he had been sent by the Havildar of the Guard to the Captain Sahib's *banda* with the chit brought by the Swahili messenger. Sepoy Arjun Atmaran testified that Orderly Shere Khan had been seated in front of the *banda*, and, with curses and foul insults, had bade him begone because the Captain Sahib was asleep and could not be awakened.

"Must not be awakened, or *could* not be awakened?" enquired the Prosecuting Counsel.

"Could not," replied the sepoy emphatically.

And the point was elaborated.

"Are you quite sure that Orderly Shere Khan said,

"*'Go away, for the Captain Sahib cannot be awakened. It is an order'*?" asked the Prosecuting Officer.

"It is the truth. I am quite sure," replied Sepoy Arjun Atmaran. "Orderly Shere Khan said,

"*'Begone, pig of a Hindoo. It is useless to wait here, for I cannot awaken the Captain Sahib. No one could awaken him. Nothing could awaken him.'*"

Nor did Shere Khan at this point improve matters at all by shooting a most sinister and baleful glare at Sepoy Arjun Atmaran, and, in a softly sibilant but clearly audible voice, promising to disembowel him at an early date.

It cannot be said that Captain Richard Wendover made a particularly good impression upon the President or any member of the Court-Martial, in spite of the fact that each of his judges was,

consciously or unconsciously, prejudiced in his favour by reason of his record, appearance, and conduct of the defence of the Fort up to the time of the death of Lieutenant Hunter-Ward—when it really seemed that he had relinquished control and command of the post to Lieutenant Breckinge and the Subedar-Major Ganga Charan.

Certainly his manner before the Court bore out, to some extent, the charge of truculence; for, short of a display of ill-manners, ill-breeding, indiscipline and contempt of court, he showed signs, to say the least of it, of short temper, frayed nerves and a lack of reverence, if not respect, for the majesty of the Law as embodied in his present judges.

His answers were brief and given with an impatience that was just not contemptuous; his attitude being one of,

“Good Lord above us, are you mad, or do you think I am? Are you drunk, that you think I was? What are you talking about; and why the devil are you talking such nonsense? Of course I drank whisky in reasonable moderation—like you do. Yes, of course I had a drink before I lay down, and of course I did not drink two bottles, neat. Why don't you ask a real fool question while you are about it?”

Without using those words, he contrived to give that tone to his defence, and to imply that the four Officers before him, or before whom he was, ought to have something better to do, especially in time of war, than to sit there pestering him with futile, puerile and idiotic questions.

Under cross-examination he became very definitely restive, put a very patent curb on what was very

obvious anger, and contrived to show that such respect as he had for the Court was not respect for any individual member of it—inasmuch as they had forfeited his regard by their incredible credulity and stupidity.

To the question,

“What’s the last thing you remember before going to sleep on the Thursday night?”

“Yawning,” he replied.

“That’s not a proper answer,” rapped the President, whose patience was being rapidly exhausted by the prisoner’s unpleasant and unrepentant manner. “Not a proper answer at all.”

“It’s the truth, anyway. Last thing I can remember is—yawning.”

“Well,” resumed the Prosecuting Officer, “we’ll go back a little further. What’s the last thing you remember before yawning?”

“Scratching myself.”

“Indeed! And before that?”

“I couldn’t be absolutely certain as to the order in which the events occurred, but I think that, before doing that, I had another drink of whisky.”

“I’ve no doubt you did. . . . Did you pour it out into a mug or drink out of the bottle?”

“Neither.”

“What d’you mean—‘*neither*’?”

“What I say. It was already poured out.”

“Oh. You mean you had another drink of what was already in the mug.”

“Obviously.”

“And how many times did you re-fill the mug?”

“None.”

“None?”

"What do you mean—'none'?" interrupted the President of the Court.

"I mean that I had not re-filled the mug at all."

"Well, what else *do* you mean, if you mean anything?"

"I mean that I finished the drink that was in the mug."

"But you've just said you took another drink."

Wendover sighed with a somewhat ostentatiously weary patience.

"I did. I took another drink at the whisky-and-water already in the mug."

Frowning, Colonel Matheson tapped the papers in front of him with the end of his pen.

"And you really mean to tell the Court," resumed the Prosecuting Officer, "that that one drink made you so absolutely drunk and incapable that Colonel Maldon was quite unable to wake you?"

"I don't mean to tell the Court anything of the sort. I have told the Court that I had one drink."

"Then how do you account for being found drunk?"

"I don't account for it. And I don't admit that I was drunk."

"In the face of all the evidence to the contrary—and part of it expert medical evidence?"

"Particularly in the face of the latter," was the reply; an answer which moved Colonel Matheson once again to remark that the accused was not doing himself or his cause any good at all by taking that sort of line.

". . . And how do you account for the fact that you never received Colonel Maldon's message?"

"Simply because it was never brought to me."

"And why was it not brought to you?"

"Because I was asleep; and because, knowing that I had had hardly any sleep for some time, my orderly refused to allow me to be awakened."

"Had you given any such instructions?"

"No."

"Doesn't it seem a little curious that your orderly should have taken it upon him, on this particular occasion, to do what you had not told him to do, and what he had never done before?"

"Curious? No. Very sensible, in the circumstances."

"H'm. . . . You deny that your orderly failed to give you the message because he was unable to wake you?"

"Totally."

"How do you know he didn't try to wake you?"

"Because he says he didn't."

"He's incapable of a lie, eh? Like all Indians. Like all Pathans."

"And like all the rest of us," growled Wendover, and again received the sharp admonition of the Court.

"You wish us to understand that, like George Washington also, he could not tell a lie, eh?" resumed the prosecution.

"Understand what you like. I said nothing of the sort. In point of fact, he's a remarkably good liar. But as it happens, he tells me the truth."

"And is he telling us the truth?"

"Absolutely—in saying he did not try to wake me."

"And once again, how do you know that?"

"Once again—because he told me so."

"Ah! . . . Now, would it surprise you to learn that,

being informed that you were asleep, Lieutenant Breckinge came and endeavoured to wake you himself?"

"It would. Very much indeed."

"What is there surprising about his coming to try to awaken you, so that you could receive the message?"

"Nothing. Nothing whatever. What would be surprising would be the fact of his *failing* to do it."

"Yes," agreed prosecuting Counsel significantly.

"It was truly surprising."

And Lieutenant Breckinge, being recalled and cross-questioned, testified again that, feeling it his duty to attempt to bring the message to the notice of his superior officer, he had tried every means known, both to lay experience and to science, of awakening a sleeper and arousing a—drunkard. And had tried in vain.

On being further cross-questioned by the defence as to why the orderly, Shere Khan, was in total ignorance of the Doctor's visit to the accused's *banda*, Breckinge quite frankly admitted that it might not be by reason of the orderly's perjury. It was quite possible that the orderly had not seen the Doctor enter the *banda*. To be quite honest, he himself couldn't remember whether the orderly had been sitting outside the *banda* (as Sepoy Arjun Atmaran had found him) or not; but it was quite possible that he had gone away for some reason. Anyhow, the fact remained . . .

And in the minds of the members of the Court it had remained.

Why *should* a doctor swear, upon oath, that he had gone to try to arouse an officer, and had been unable to do so, if such were not the case?

No, it cannot be said that the accused made a

favourable impression upon his judges, five plain, honourable, simple men; men who would infinitely have preferred to find the accused Not Guilty; men anxious only to do their duty; but at the same time anxiously hopeful that it might be the pleasant duty of acquitting a brother officer of a shameful charge.

Nevertheless, had one of them been a doctor, and that doctor a man of wide experience, keen powers of observation and of sympathetic understanding, there would have been at least one member of the Court-Martial who would not have written down the accused as merely truculent and resentful almost to the point of insolence.

To such a man, the undeniable "queerness" of the accused would have suggested an explanation which did not occur to any layman present at the trial, save only—and very briefly—to Captain B. ce.

A doctor there was, but he was not a judge.

He was a witness, and for the Prosecution.

Not for him was it to draw attention to the condition of the pupils of the accused's eyes; the state of his skin; his breathing; his manner (most unusual in Wendover) of alternating excitement and lethargy, a period of irritability followed by one of apparent indifference, weariness and boredom.

To him, the reason for the accused's appearance and conduct was known; and to the judges he had no intention of making it known.

And as he sat and watched the man whom he considered to be his mortal enemy, no smile of satisfaction marred the extremely correct expression of his coun-

tenance while he offered himself double felicitation—as a scientist and as a man of affairs.

As a man of affairs, he had given an enemy a lesson and a well-deserved punishment; to himself a neat revenge and a well-earned gratification.

As a man of science, genuinely interested in toxicology, he had evidently effected the perfect quantitative combination of morphine, *datura* and the little-known—indeed, to Europeans unknown—native drug which the African *shenzis* call *tafu*, and which has very remarkable properties.

Yes, any good doctor present at the Court-Martial would have known that there was something mentally and physically—and temporarily—wrong with the accused; and he might have saved him.

Lieutenant Breckinge knew exactly what was wrong, and that nobody but Lieutenant Breckinge could save him.

Young Captain Brace, an imaginative and very conscientious man, was sorely worried. As junior officer of the Court-Martial he would be the first called upon to pronounce judgment, in accordance with the salutary rule which orders this procedure, by reason of the fact that the opinion of junior officers would probably be swayed by that of their experienced seniors.

Having carefully studied King's Regulations, he was aware that an officer found guilty by Field General Court-Martial, was liable to the penalties of death, penal servitude for life, a term of imprisonment, cashiering, dismissal from the Service, reduction in seniority, reprimand, or fine by stoppage of pay.

Clearly there could be no question as to the verdict.

Most obviously Captain Richard Wendover was guilty, and the prolongation of the trial scarcely necessary, in view of the fact that Colonel Maldon had himself found him drunk and incapable while in command of a post in time of war.

What would the punishment be, provided the verdict were 'Guilty'—as it must be?

Death!

For that to be the sentence, all members of the Court-Martial must concur. They must be unanimous in their condemnation of him to death; and then the finding of the Court must be confirmed by superior authority, presumably the General Officer Commanding at Headquarters. And after that, he believed the proceedings of the Court-Martial would have to be reviewed by the Judge-Advocate-General, who could agree to, or refuse, the confirmation of the General. But probably the death sentence would be considered unnecessarily harsh and severe.

Penal servitude or imprisonment?

A dreadful thought. On the other hand, it was a very dreadful thing that an Officer of the King, in ~~time~~ of war, should do such a thing, set such an example.

Yes, the sentence might well be one of imprisonment, seeing that the offence had been committed on active service. Probably much would depend on the view taken by the General; and, whatever he and the Judge-Advocate-General thought about it, there was still the right of appeal, either to the Army Council or through the Army Council to the King.

Well, it might be a wise provision that the junior officer must speak first; but he could wish the authori-

ties had not been quite so wise. He would greatly have preferred to hear what Colonel Matheson, Major Bonnington, Major Hawley and Captain Marvin had to say, before he was called on to open his mouth.

The sentence of the Court, confirmed by the General Officer Commanding, and reviewed without objection by the Judge-Advocate-General, was that Captain Richard Wendover, for behaving in a scandalous manner unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, be cashiered. In other words, dismissed with ignominy from the King's Service, not only forfeiting his commission, but being permanently disqualified from ever serving the State in any capacity whatsoever.

It was generally considered that Captain Wendover had been very lucky, treated very leniently; and that his previous good service had been given every consideration and been allowed to weigh very heavily in his favour.

But few of his friends and acquaintances heard with regret, some months later, that Richard Wendover was dead; and perhaps those who loved him best regarded this as best.

Richard Wendover was dead—and better dead.

PART II

CHAPTER I

MAJOR ROBINSON, R.E., in charge of the construction of the Morovo section of the railway that was being built from Navoi to Tabundi, was having trouble again at rail-head; trouble between his Hindu and Mohammedan labour forces—masons, navvies and coolies—and trouble between himself and the unruly and turbulent Pathan gangs who called themselves *karygars*, *mymars* and *barkays*—artisans, skilled workmen, builders, carpenters and masons worth fifty rupees a month, and who were nothing of the sort, being mere brawny unskilled labourers, plain coolies worth something more like ten rupees.

Outspokenly, these sturdy rogues called Major Robinson a skinflint, a hard-faced robber who ground the faces of the poor; while Major Robinson, equally outspoken, called them what they were, impostors, liars and humbugs.

This would have been all very well had these gangs of Afridis, Mahsuds, Mohmands, Zakka Khel, Ghilzais, Shinwaris and assorted tribesmen from the North-West Frontier of India, been Hindus or even British subjects. Since they were nobody's subjects, and each man not only considered himself, but knew himself, to be as good a man as Major Robinson, and perhaps a good deal better, awkward crises were apt to arise; and it was then that Major Robinson and Mr. Angus

Mackenzie, his Superintendent of Works, wished that the nearest body of armed Military Police or Company of the King's African Rifles was not quite so far away.

But for the turbulent Pathans, trouble among the thousands of Indian coolies working on the line would have been easily settled and almost negligible.

As it was, the two Britons knew that they went not only in danger of their lives, but, what was much more important, in grave danger of a more or less protracted hold-up of the work that had to be completed by a given date, a day which seemed to approach with greater speed than that with which the railway approached its destination.

The Pathans were a curse, and, but for the fact that any one of them could do the unskilled work of two Hindus, they would never have been engaged and imported, by labour-contractors, from Peshawar to Mombasa, to be despatched to the great railway construction work.

And having engaged them and brought them to Africa, there was no dismissing them, apart from any question of contract, for they would not have accepted dismissal; and had not their pay been forthcoming promptly, there would have been a riot, loot, destruction and murder.

So that it was not with great enthusiasm that Major Robinson interviewed two Pathans brought to him by the *jemadar maistri* in charge of a gang of navvies.

It appeared that the two men had, in the amazing way of the wandering Pathan, strolled up from the coast, and had applied for work. However, inasmuch as they were a pair of fine upstanding men, whose

faces he rather liked, and who seemed to have no unduly exalted ideas of their powers, importance and value as workmen, he agreed to the *jemadar maistri* engaging them.

As Major Robinson turned away with a curt, "You may go," the applicant calling himself Shere Khan, and who had spoken for the two of them, observed casually, and speaking not only as man to man but as equal to equal,

"Oh, by the way, we found a dead Sahib three days ago."

"What? Where?" enquired Robinson.

"Oh, over there," replied the Pathan, pointing to the north. "In the bush, out on the plains, three days ago. Undoubtedly a Sahib—or part of one."

"What do you mean?"

"A lion had had him. These are his boots that I am wearing."

"The man's boots, I mean. Not the lion's," he added with a chuckle.

What nameless tragedy was this? Some adventurous wandering trader, professional hunter, missionary, cold-weather big-game sportsman, planter out on a shooting-trip, or what?

"But were there no 'boys' anywhere near? No camp?"

"No; nobody."

"What did you do with his rifle?"

"Hadn't got one."

"I don't believe it."

"No?"

"What did you do with the body?"

"Buried it."

"Oh? What with?"

"Well, not to say buried it, perhaps," replied the Pathan. "Piled stones on it, you know, and put a *boma* of thorn-branches round the cairn."

"H'm. How was the body dressed?"

"Rags and blood, mostly. He had only had a shirt, shorts, puttees and boots, like yourself."

"Oh. No rifle, hunting-knife, ammunition-belt?"

"No. Nothing," grinned the Pathan.

"And you brought away nothing except the boots, eh?"

"Yes," replied the Pathan, and nodding his head in the direction of his companion, added, "He said, '*Bring the top of the collar of the shirt along,*' because it had got writing on it, and doubtless we should get a large reward," and he grinned again.

"Well, where is it?"

From beneath his own long and dirty shirt, worn outside baggy trousers fastened round the ankle, the Pathan produced a piece of soiled and blood-stained khaki which, unrolled, proved to be the collar and part of the yoke of a khaki army shirt, on the inner side of which was sewn a white tab on which ~~was~~ worked, in small red letters, the name of its owner:

R. WENDOVER.

"Mackenzie!" called Major Robinson as he stared at the rag. "Come and look at this."

And from his tent, pitched close by, the Superintendent of Works emerged.

"Look," said Robinson, holding out the fragment of shirt.

Mackenzie read the name and stared in amazement.

"Good God!" he whispered, "Wendover. That's the chap who was kicked out of the army, for being drunk in charge of a fort, and disappeared, isn't it?"

"That's the chap. Vanished at Nairobi when he should have been going down to Kilindini to take ship for England. Supposed to have cleared off and gone native instead of going—Home."

"Best thing he could do, too," observed Mackenzie.

"Well, these two bright lads seem to have found his body," said Robinson. "Took this off a white man's body, anyhow. Been mauled and half eaten by a lion."

"Just as likely they murdered him," opined Angus Mackenzie, who had very little love, and only grudging admiration, for Pathans.

"Quite likely," agreed Major Robinson, "but for the fact that they brought his collar here. Why should they do that if they had come across him camped in the jungle, and murdered him for his rifle and kit?"

"To get a reward for 'finding' him," observed Mackenzie pawkily.

"Wouldn't put it past them. In point of fact, the chap who brought it does propose that he be rewarded. Said the other cove noticed the name on the collar, and suggested taking it to the nearest official. High sense of public duty—stimulated by hope of something out of the poor-box."

"Well, there it is," he added. "Whether the lion did him in or they did him down, it seems to put clear *Finis* to the Wendover story, doesn't it?"

"Yes, poor devil! And not even Christian burial," agreed Angus Mackenzie, a strictly pious and religious-minded man, to whom such an idea was most abhorrent.

"I suppose they want a job of work," he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, we can do with them."

"What's your name?" Major Robinson asked the man who had produced the collar.

"Shere Khan," was the reply.

"And yours?"

"Gul Mahommed," growled the other.

"Well, I'll keep this and . . ."

"What reward do I get, *Huzoor*?" asked Shere Khan.

"Reward? I don't know. A rope perhaps. We'll wait and hear what the Police have to say about it when they've found the body and discovered whether the lion killed him with a bullet or a knife. You may go."

Shere Khan and Gul Mahommed saluted airily and went, grinning broadly.

In due course, and when opportunity arose, Major Robinson reported Shere Khan's story to the District Officer, and forwarded the piece of khaki shirt bearing the name of Wendover.

Later, an officer of the Railway Police arrived at the ever-advancing rail-head and questioned the two Pathans, Shere Khan and Gul Mahommed, but was unable to shake their testimony.

Inasmuch as the scene of the tragedy was apparently fifty or sixty miles distant; was in some vague and unlocated spot on the vast rolling scrub-covered Kathe-dong Plains, search for the grave was, not unnaturally, fruitless. A patrol of the King's African Rifles, having business in that direction, kept a sharp look-out for

a little thorn-enclosed cairn of stones that should mark a grave ; and with the same degree of hope and success wherewith they would have sought a needle in a haystack.

§ 2

Although under some slight suspicion of murder, the two Pathans, Shere Khan and Gul Mahommed, earned the approval of their overseer, who reported them as being steady, if utterly unskilled, workers, quiet and well-behaved men, not troublesome nor truculent, and peaceful beyond the ordinary of Pathans. Indeed, the silent one, Gul Mahommed, was the sort of man who might look for promotion by reason of his unusual intelligence, industry and sense of responsibility. He would make a very good gang-leader and, in time, a *maistri* foreman-overseer of navvies. It was a great pity he had been taught no trade and was not a skilled mason.

Like his fellow-tribesman, brother or friend, he really knew nothing at all about working or dressing stone ; and, having no knowledge whatever of stone-cutting, could not possibly be called a *mymar*, a mason, and be given forty or fifty rupees a month. Yet it was a pity to keep him as an ordinary coolie, because, although untaught and untrained, he undoubtedly had brain as well as brawn.

Major Robinson, who had served on the North-West Frontier of India, spoke Pushtu, and not only knew the Pathan well but liked him very well—save when he had to employ him in bulk as a labour force.

He preferred Pathan soldiers to any other, and numbered among the head-men of the Khyber country many friends whose village hospitality he had enjoyed when on survey or shooting trips. Shoot you in the front, as an uninvited and unwanted trespasser, they would . . . Stab you in the back while, or after, enjoying their hospitality they would not.

And frequently, Robinson chatted with the Pathan workmen of his construction gangs. When, through some real or fancied grievance, generally the latter, there was trouble afoot or mischief brewing, they would be unresponsive, surly and unfriendly. At other times, they would talk freely, as man to man, with quip and jest, sly reference to alleged victories of the Tribesmen over the British, and to all-too-authentic and bloody raids upon Peshawar.

As a man, they liked Major Robinson, who knew their country and spoke their language, even though, as a paymaster, they might dislike him to the point of cutting his throat.

With Shere Khan and his friend Gul Mahommed, as two of the pleasantest and most interesting of the Pathans, Major Robinson frequently talked. Widely travelled, they knew much of India and Africa; and had, in Robinson's opinion, undoubtedly served in the Indian Army.

Of the two, Shere Khan was the more forthcoming, merry and chatty—a most genial great ruffian; Gul Mahommed the more intelligent, educated and observant. He took great interest in news of the outside world which reached Major Robinson with his somewhat irregular and infrequent mail. Two very fine specimens of a very fine race. Indeed, as Major

Robinson remarked to Mr. Angus Mackenzie, two of the nicest murderers he had ever met.

He had good occasion to think so later—though he was left but little time or inclination for thinking of anything for some while—by reason of the receipt of a most amazing letter. This was written in pencil on a piece of somewhat dirty paper which had been found near, or purloined from, the hut which served as Mr. Mackenzie's Office of Works. Written in perfect English and excellent handwriting, it ran as follows :

" Sir,

You are most urgently advised to carry a revolver to-morrow, loaded, and to keep the flap of the holster unfastened, if you go near the Pathan construction-gangs, or if a deputation comes to your tent. Also to look out for an ambush if you go by trolley to the bridge. There is trouble brewing among the Mahsud coolies whom you have refused to pay at mason rates.

Do please take notice of this warning.

Yours very sincerely,

John Smith."

" What do you make of this, Mackenzie ? " he asked his Superintendent of Works.

" Who the devil is John Smith ? " was the reply.

" God knows. There's no such person about here, that I've heard of."

" Just what I was thinking," was the reply. " Smith ? Smith ? There's no European at rail-head or for a hundred miles, is there, except the Doctor ; and as his name's Hannington, he probably doesn't spell it Smith."

"Nor write anonymous letters," agreed Robinson, "or rather, write under a *nom de plume*."

"What's the Greek contractor's name?" asked Mackenzie.

"Pericles Anastasiadi Economosodimitriadi or words to that effect; and not pronounced Smith. And if he knew that a gang was going to ambush me, he'd lend 'em a gun, I should think."

"And the hospital assistant? He's a Goanese. Da Sousa, isn't he?"

"Yes. One of the great and distinguished family of the Da Sousas of Goa."

"And that's not his handwriting?"

"No, nothing like it. Besides, he wouldn't do good by stealth and blush to find it fame. Or hide his light under a bushel of blue pills."

"No; queer, isn't it? Do any of the Sikh *maistris* write English?"

"Not this sort of English, certainly. Besides, why make a mystery of it?"

"Horrible ghastly pun," observed the unsmiling Mackenzie. "Shocking. But a *maistri* might make a mystery of it—for fear it became known that he had warned you and would share your fate for doing so."

"Well, he could tell me privately, couldn't he? Anyway, this wasn't written by a Sikh *maistri* or any other native. It's damned queer."

"Yes. Do you know what I'd do, Robinson?"

"What?"

"Precisely what the letter says."

"No particular harm in doing that, anyway—though I don't quite see what good a revolver is going to do against a hundred of 'em. And how can one 'look out

for an ambush ' when one's buzzing along the line on a trolley ? ”

“ Well, as to the revolver, the fact that you were wearing it would have quite a deterrent effect on the lad deputed to knock you down when the others come crowding round. And that's how one gets killed in these shemozzles. Somebody lays you out with the haft of a pick-axe, and all the rest have a whang at you. Then it's nobody's murder, because nobody did more than kick your ribs in or bust your skull.”

“ You always were a cheerful cove, Mackenzie.”

“ Yes. And as for the ambush, you can at least keep awake and notice a little thing like a sleeper across the line, or a rock.”

“ Oh, well, if they are going to get me, they'll get me.”

“ Not a doubt of it,” agreed Mackenzie, as he went off : and, like Major Robinson, forgot all about the matter.

§ 3

But Major Robinson was reminded of it quite soon, when making his usual inspection from rail-head to the temporary bridge beside which a permanent one was in course of construction over a wide and deep nullah.

Across the line lay not merely a sleeper or a rock, but a very respectable barricade of sleepers and big blocks of stone.

There was nothing for it but to stop.

As the coolies who, at a quick run, were pushing the trolley along the line, came to a standstill, a large band

of Pathans emerged from the dense jungle on either side of the line, each man being armed with some such weapon as a stone-hammer, pick-axe, a spade or a crow-bar.

Well, here it was.

The warning had been genuine enough, and it was a pity he had not brought his revolver ; not because he believed for one moment that a revolver was going to save him from a gang of some fifty Pathan *budmashes*—than whom there are no more determined and callous ruffians in the world—but because it would have afforded him definite satisfaction to have given half a dozen of them something to remember him by—or cause to forget him, and everything else, for ever.

As he rose to his feet and stood up on the trolley platform, the trolley-coolies and the native overseer who accompanied him fled into the jungle.

“ Well, why aren’t you worthless, idle, loafing, blackguards at work ? ” he asked, standing cool and self-possessed, hands on hips, and glancing angrily from face to face.

The answer was a menacing howl of defiance as the two mobs coalesced and crowded round the trolley, brandishing crow-bars, stone-hammers and other ugly weapons.

“ Now then, stop that damned row,” shouted Robinson. “ Who’s your leader ? If you’ve got anything to say, let him say it.”

“ Oh, it’s you, is it, Khawas Khan,” he added, as a squint-eyed scoundrel was thrust to the front. “ I thought as much. What do you want ? ”

With regret he noted that the man was closely

followed by Shere Khan, one of the two Pathans with whom he had frequently talked.

"More pay, you Son of Shaitan," shouted the man. "Fifty rupees a month, we want, you infidel pig." And spat.

"Oh, you do, do you! Weil, listen," began Robinson.

If he could turn ambush-for murder into a wrangle-for-wages and a vulgar slanging-match, he might get away with it; might save his life. Truculent and treacherous brutes as these Mahsuds were, it was improbable that they would murder him in cold blood if he could get them to listen to him, to air their grievances, and to bargain. Certainly they wouldn't if he could make them laugh.

As they hadn't rushed him and battered him to death immediately the trolley stopped, there was a chance.

"You think you are worth fifty rupees a month, do you? How much did they pay you in Peshawar Gaol for your work when you got three months' hard labour for stealing *pice* out of a blind man's begging bowl?"

There was a loud laugh from Shere Khan.

"What? *Me?* You liar, I . . ." shouted Khawas Khan.

"Or was it for knocking a boy down and running away with his stick of sugar-cane?"

"*Me?*" I . . ."

"Or was it for shooting your wife from behind a rock—because she used to beat you so?"

At this there was a general snigger.

"Oh yes, that was it. You told the Court you went in fear of your life—and went in fear of your wife. I remember."

The snigger became a roar of laughter.

"Well? What did they pay you in gaol?"

"I never . . ."

"No. Never got an *anna*, did you? And you have the damned impudence to come here and talk to me about fifty rupees, you jungly coolie. *You!* Fifty rupees! You're not worth fifty *pice*,¹ really. Not like some of these men, who *are* men."

The equivalent of "*Hear, hear!*" was heard from several members of the jostling crowd.

"Now then, talk sense, just for once in your life. Can you dress stone?"

"Yes, I can," bawled Khawas Khan.

"Well then, why don't you do it? Why have you hidden your great cleverness all this time? You shall start to-morrow. And if you do it well, you shall get fifty rupees. That good enough?"

More cries of approval from the crowd.

"Very well, that's you. Now then, anybody else here think he can dress stone? And do proper mason's work? If so, I want him. Can't get too many trained *mymars*. Fifty rupees for any man that can earn it."

"Fifty rupees for everybody," bawled a loud harsh voice.

Robinson glanced quickly in the direction of the speaker.

"You, Yacoub Beg? *You?* I wouldn't insult you with it. You ought to have a hundred."

All heads turned to where Yacoub Beg towered above the rest.

"A hundred?" he said stupidly.

¹ *Farthings.*

“ Yes—across your back,” was the reply

And after the yelp of laughter that followed this bright sally had ceased, he added :

“ What you want and what you’ll get is a hundred *days*—Mombasa Gaol—when the Railway Police come up again. For starting a riot, you . . .”

Khawas Khan replied not in words, but, swinging a great hammer, made a rush at the trolley, only to trip and fall heavily, as Shere Khan thrust out a foot.

So that was it, was it ? Shere Khan was on the side of the angels. Good man.

“ *Fool*,” roared Shere Khan in a voice like that of a bellowing bull as Khawas Khan rose to his feet, “ Do you want us all hanged for . . . ? ”

Khawas Khan raised his hammer to smash Shere Khan’s skull ; but with the quickness and skill of a man who had learned bayonet-fighting, Shere Khan, holding his spade like a rifle, drove it hard at Khawas Khan’s throat, the sharp edge inflicting an ugly wound, and again sending him sprawling.

With shouts of “ *Kill ! Kill !* ” the crowd surged in upon Shere Khan, as a giant Mahsud sprang on to the trolley. Him, Robinson smote with all his strength upon the point of the jaw as he was in the act of striking, knocking him back upon those who followed and impeding the rush upon Shere Khan.

As the fellow dropped his long-handled hammer, Robinson stooped and seized it. Might as well die fighting, and he had got to do something for Shere Khan.

“ *Back*, you herd of swine ! ” he shouted. “ Drop those tools and get back to your work. Go on,

you worthless sons of pigs. Back to your work—or I'll . . ."

"*Kill! Kill!*"

Not a hope. For once the master's word of command fell upon deaf ears.

Well, not such a bad death—to die fighting.

Bang! . . . Bang! . . . Bang!

And again. And again. And again.

"*The Police! The Police!*" was the cry, and—

"*Run! Run!*" shouted Shere Khan, setting the example as the fusillade from the jungle began afresh, and heading the swift and sudden flight from death.

Major Robinson heaved a great sigh of relief and wiped his brow.

A near thing.

§ 4

"Can't make it out at all," said Major Robinson to the District Officer, as he, the Superintendent of Railway Police, and Angus Mackenzie sat about the camp table outside his tent, a few days later. "It's a mystery. It was an absolute fusillade. That saved the situation, of course. Nevertheless, but for Shere Khan, they'd undoubtedly have done me in, before the shooting; and, but for the shooting, they'd have done us both in. And when I sent for Shere Khan that night, to pat him on the back and ask if he wasn't afraid of the others rounding on him, he had disappeared."

"And the other fellow—what did you say his name was . . ."

"Gul Mahommed."

"... has disappeared too?" asked the Superintendent of Police.

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose they thought they had better go while the going was good, after upsetting the ring-leaders' apple-cart," surmised the District Officer.

"Yes, but what I don't understand, is his not coming to me before he bolted. It isn't like a Pathan."

"No," agreed Mackenzie. "You don't catch him missing anything good. Probably hadn't time."

"By the way," observed the District Officer, "you didn't see his pal in the crowd?"

"No. I'm almost sure he wasn't in the mob. Anyhow, he wasn't to the fore—wasn't backing-up Shere Khan."

"Well then, the idea occurs to me that it may have been he who did the shooting!" observed the District Officer thoughtfully.

"What with?" asked the Superintendent of Police.

"He certainly hadn't a rifle when he came here," said Robinson.

"No, not across his shoulder," replied the District Officer. "But weren't they the two who professed to have discovered Wendover's corpse? And whether they killed him or not, and whether it was Wendover or not, isn't it more than likely they got his rifle and ammunition if they found a white man who had been killed by a lion?"

"Or if they murdered one," murmured the District Officer.

"It may or may not have been Wendover," continued the District Officer. "Almost certainly was.

And they may or may not have found him or his remains, but it is quite likely they 'found' a rifle—or a revolver."

"By Jove! You've said something," applauded Robinson. "That would account for the rapid fire—there were at least six quick shots. It accounts for the brief 'cease fire,' and then the second burst of 'rapid.' That would be quite consistent with the fellow pooping off six chambers, loading quickly, and doing it again."

"But you'd have known a rifle from a revolver," observed Mackenzie.

"You might, 'my dear Watson,'" jeered Robinson. "Personally I was a bit too hot and bothered to analyse . . . Besides, an army revolver fired towards you at close range makes quite a noise.

"Yes, there must have been about a dozen shots," he added.

"The Wendover revolver idea is a theory, anyway," observed the Superintendent of Police. "It would account for the number and rapidity of the shots, and also for a Pathan having a pistol here."

"Yes, that's about it. It was a one-man show," agreed Robinson, "though it sounded like 'independent' from a section of K.A.R.'s."

"And taken in conjunction with the letter you got, it's an amazing business," said the District Officer.

"Still more amazing that Shere Khan and his boyfriend didn't pay you a nocturnal visit and suggest *bakshish*," observed the Superintendent of Railway Police.

"By the way," he added half apologetically, "excuse

what sounds humourous, but I suppose this well-donethou-good-and-faithful-servant Shere Khan feller isn't—Wendover himself in disguise?"

Major Robinson laughed.

"Good Lord, no. This chap's three inches taller than poor Wendover was. I met him once at the Yacht Club in Bombay. Oh— inches taller. Bigger altogether. And older. Nothing like him. No. Shere Khan's a Pathan all right."

"And the other chap, what's-his-name—Jan Mahommed?"

"Gul Mahommed? Wendover? Not he. He's a Pathan all right. I used to talk to him."

"I still think he may have done the shooting though—or why wasn't he with Shere Khan," said the District Officer. "He and Shere Khan knew what was coming and laid a proper Pathan plot to diddle their pals and get a reward for saving you. One did the patter and the other the shooting."

"And yet nobody was hit," he mused.

"No. The mob ran like hares—no doubt thinking that the artful Sahib had ambushed their ambush! . . . Still, whoever was shooting could have got somebody with his first two or three rounds."

"Aye," agreed Mackenzie, "and a great pity he didn't."

And at the same time, Shere Khan was making much the same observation to his beloved friend and former master, Captain Richard Wendover.

"You should have shot half a dozen of the swine, *Huzoor*," he said. "Especially that squint-eyed, black-faced bastard, Khawas Khan."

"Oh, no need," replied 'Gul Mahommed.' "I'd have shot straight enough if it had been necessary."

But Shere Khan shook his head. There was only one thing to do with enemies. Otherwise, what was the good of having enemies.

§ 5

Richard Wendover, seated cross-legged with his friend and follower, Shere Khan, on the dirty matting of the broad balcony at the back of a native seamen's eating house in Vasco da Gama bazaar of Zanzibar, gazed unseeing across the rustling palms to the white beach and sapphire sea of the strait that divides the island from the mainland.

"*Huzoor*,"¹ said Shere Khan.

"Once again, don't call me *Huzoor*. You must get into the way of calling me Gul Mahommed," said Wendover.

"There's no one within hearing, *Huzoor*," smiled Shere Khan.

"No. Not here. But you might say it on some occasion when there is. It might lead to all sorts of trouble if you call me *Huzoor* in the presence of someone understanding the meaning of the word."

"*Huzoor*, it is not fitting and seemly that I, your servant, should address you familiarly thus. Shall I, whose life you saved at the risk of your own; I, who have served you, ridden behind you in the ranks, been your orderly and your man, use 'thou' and 'thee' when . . ."

"Yes. Try to get it, once and for all, into your thick

¹ *Sahib ; master ; presence.*

skull that the past is past, that I am no longer your Officer, a Sahib and an Englishman. I am a homeless dog. I am nothing. Since you refuse to leave me . . ."

"Never will I leave you, *Huzoor*. Never while I draw breath, and you will tolerate my presence," and unconsciously Shere Khan plagiarized. "Entreat me not to leave the presence of the Sahib," he said, touching his forehead with the finger-tips of hands clasped as in prayer. "Bid me to be his servant and follower. For wheresoever he goeth there will I go; and my people shall be his people."

" . . . Since you refuse to leave me, Shere Khan, and ask me to bid you not to leave me, it is possible only for you to stay with me as a friend and an equal. If you can do that, ceasing to call me *Huzoor*, and calling me friend and brother—Gul Mahommed and not *Huzoor*—we can travel together, adventure together, live together. But friends and equals we must be. And as for my people being thy people, Shere Khan, I have no people. I have finished with those that were. They have cast me out. So be it."

"I said '*Let my people be thy people*'—Gul Mahommed," smiled Shere Khan.

And looking up quickly from out the dark dream in which he brooded, Gul Mahommed gazed into the eyes of Shere Khan.

"Let thy people be my people?" he whispered. "Become a Pathan myself."

"*Huzoor*,"

"Gul Mahommed," growled Wendover.

"Air and water of this land are bad," continued Shere Khan, using the Pathan formula of objection to foreign places.

And indeed the air of all plains compares unfavourably with that of a tribesman's hills.

§ 6

After a long period of brooding cogitation, weeks of black misery, during which he fought bitterness and Giant Despair with the weapons of philosophy and courage, Richard Wendover came to a decision.

He would go on living, and he would live in his own way.

His announcement of his final and fixed intentions for the future filled his friend Shere Khan with extravagant joy.

Having made up his mind, he also made certain arrangements, financial and other, through the far-famed and trusted Arab pearl-merchant, broker and banker, Suleiman Zanzibari.

And now to live a really interesting life, a man's life among men, a mad life—while the hideous wound healed over and he returned to mental wholeness and, perchance, to forgetfulness and peace.

CHAPTER II

THE Arab dhow made its steady way northward over a deep blue oily sea, running before a favouring breeze that kept its huge triangular lateen sail bellied from its forward-slanting mast, and put an apparently dangerous strain upon the piece of string which fastened to it the tapering yard, longer than the mast itself and almost as perpendicular.

To at least one of its crew, a surly and taciturn Pathan, Gul Mahommed, it seemed little short of a miracle that so crank a craft should not only propose to make its way from Zanzibar on the south-eastern coast of Africa to Muscat in the Persian Gulf, but should actually do so; and with a certain regularity that gave suggestion of competence, reliability, and safety; almost of infallibility.

The *naukhada* or captain, seated at the helm, a roughly rounded spar attached to the high-posted rudder, knew not when the dhow would reach Muscat, but that it would eventually reach that remarkable town he did know, such being the will of Allah.

Always it had been the will of Allah, and doubtless always it would be—but as to when, who knew or cared?

To the *naukhadas* of the East African coasting trade, the wind bloweth not whither it listeth, but where it is directed—by Allah of course—and that is invariably

due south-west during six months of the year and due north-east for the other six months. Save for these two directions, it has no choice ; and thus will it always blow—save when it blows not at all and there is a dead calm, dead being a sinisterly appropriate word, since such a calm is the dhow-crew's greatest danger. Few such seamen meet death by drowning ; many suffer death from thirst.

No, it being the will of Allah that the blessed monsoon should blow straight and steady along the coast, then what should prevent the ship from reaching port ?

So many times had the good Kassim bin Isa made the journey from the time when he was a black imp of a cabin-boy—taken to sea that there might be someone to do the cooking and receive the kicking ; climb the mast ; steer, and clean the pots—that, like a Devon fisherman, he could wake up in the morning, or indeed during the night or the afternoon siesta, and tell you exactly where he was—off Pemba Island, Mombasa, Malindi, Lamu, or Port Durnford in British East Africa ; Kismayu, Brava, Merka, Mogadishu, Warsheik, Ras Aswad, Obbia, Ras Awath, Ras Hafun or Cape Gardafui in Italian Somaliland—and after that you had to look out that you were not run down by the great fire-ships steaming out of the Gulf of Aden—or off the Socotra Islands.

And, at any given time, he could thereafter tell you about how far you were across the Gulf of Aden—not so bad a place in which to be becalmed as, sooner or later, a passing ship would be sure to answer your signal and give you water. And having crossed the Gulf of Aden, he could tell you where you were off the coast of Arabia, the horrible Hadh-ramaut coast where, once you

had passed the Bled el Engris, the country of the English who held Aden, you could hardly hope for food, water, or friendship, except, perhaps, at the Kuria Muria Islands, until you turned the Ras el Hadd, put your helm over, entered the Gulf of Oman and reached Muscat at the south-eastern end of the Persian Gulf.

So when Gul Mahommed or his friend Shere Khan asked the *naukhada*—in their horrible, if amazingly effective mixture of Pushtu, Hindustani and Swahili, with an occasional helpful word of Arabic—when they would reach Muscat, he would reply reassuringly and quite definitely :

“ When Allah wills.”

Gul Mahommed who, in other days and other places, had been a keen yachtsman, rather enjoyed the long sea-voyage, and was interested in this weird hundred-ton craft, with its almost fiddle-bow, the stem rising with a long slope from the water, and its single yard of such enormous length, and its definitely mediæval Portuguese stern. Also in its attractive motley crew of scallywags, homogeneous only in their cheerful villainy—slavers, gun-runners, pearl-poachers, hashish-smugglers ; scoundrels all.

The *naukhada* and *neapara* were Arabs, as were two or three of the leading gentlemen, capitalists, financiers of anything in the way of slave, rifle, pearl or hashish business, but primarily gun-runners.

Next to them in the ethnological scale, were Negro-Arab pearl-poachers, Swahili smugglers and a pair of Abyssinian slavers ; then three or four Somalis, *charas* dealers ; and the remainder assorted negroes hailing from every part of the coast, from Delagoa Bay to Port Sudan—Dervishes, Sudanese, Zanzibaris, Seedees,

and lastly the coal-black crew of Hubshis, just plain nigger.

Watching the Captain and his Mate, the Bosun and his men, the passengers and their servants, Gul Mahommed decided that probably the biggest scoundrel of the lot was a French half-caste from Djbouti, Jean Moron, who unnecessarily added European vices to the fine assortment natural and native to those of his African birth and breeding, unless it were the Portuguese half-caste Miguel Lobo from Mozambique, who ran him very close.

In the *lingua franca* of the coast, this pair wrangled incessantly, each claiming that the life of his home town was more vicious than that of the other; the French subject hotly defending the claims of Djbouti against those of Mozambique, the Portuguese denying, and protesting with weighty evidence; the twain uniting to agree that the British police had utterly ruined Port Said, and quarrelling once more as to whether Marseilles was or was not worse than Macao, and now the wickedest city in the world.

Widely travelled and experienced gentlemen, who had not only witnessed but done some remarkable deeds.

And if this crew of police-dodging ruffians, who went in mortal fear of the British Navy, was interesting, how much more so, reflected Gul Mahommed, must be the history of this sinister slave-dhow, of which the hull at least was probably not less than a hundred years old. What cargoes she had carried; what crimes she had seen, as she dodged across the Red Sea or the Persian Gulf, laden with slaves or rifles, crept into little secret harbours to land rich ragged men and their

cargo of priceless pearls ; crept cautiously into ports where venal Customs men passed innocent bales, whether of hides or of cotton or piece-goods, that hid guilty secrets in the shape of parcels of *charas*, the deadly hashish drug.

It was clearly understood by all the company that the two big men, uncommunicative, haughty and truculent, alien in all things save that they were sons of the Prophet, calling like the others upon Allah, were interested in the gun-running business, the supplying of rifles to the Tribesmen of the mountains lying far to the north of the Persian coast.

And interested one of them undoubtedly was. The facts of the source and means of the supply, together with the problem of the best method of preventing it from meeting its great demand, had deeply interested Richard Wendover from the days when such rifles had been fired at him in the Khyber Pass. It was now his present intention to be a gun-runner and to trace the course of a rifle from producer to consumer, from shop to customer, from Muscat to Kabul and beyond.

And so to the ancient city of Muscat on the shores of the Gulf of Oman at the entrance to the Persian Gulf.

CHAPTER III

TO Richard Wendover, amateur of adventure, interested from childhood in new places and fresh people, the unique town of Muscat was most intriguing, with its medley of Arabian, Persian, Indian, African, Afghan and many other peoples ; its amazing combination of the tenth, the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries ; its air of intrigue and mystery, and its complete difference from all other places that he had hitherto visited.

As the dhow slowly approached the land-locked harbour on the iron-bound, rocky, barren coast that reminded Wendover of that of Aden, "like a burnt-out barrack stove," the *naukhada* and his mate uttered remarkable curses, pungent, powerful and comprehensive, as the light cruiser H.M.S. *Fox* was sighted, a ship from their point of view inappropriately named, inasmuch as the dhow was all too apt and liable to be the fox, and the *Fox*, her pinnaces and boats, the huntsman and the pack of hounds that would pursue her to her undoing.

The gun-runners vied with the *naukhada*, the Mate and the Bosun in cursing the British warship, for to them she represented past and potential losses of hundreds of thousands of rupees in contraband rifles seized and cast into the ocean.

With them, in friendly rivalry, competed the slavers

to whom the *Fox* had meant, or might mean, cruel loss and bitter constraint—in Aden gaol.

And to the volume of their prayers were added those of the *hashish*-smugglers and the pearl-poachers.

To be in the fashion and to maintain their rôle of anxious business men, deeply concerned in the gun-running industry, Shere Khan and Gul Mahommed lifted up deep voices, calling the particular attention and peculiar attentions of Allah to the thrice-accursed sport-spoiling Infidels.

Further up the harbour lay the Muscat Navy, in the shape of a gunboat called *The Sheikh*, the pride and joy of the heart of His Highness the Sultan, a valuable ship which could do almost anything but steam from its moorings, and equipped with a handsome complement of guns, useful and ornamental, that would do almost anything but fire—move up, move down, move left, move right, forward, backward ; provide resting-place and support for tired naval men and seagulls ; impress friend and foe alike ; improve the appearance of the ship ; serve as *cache* and ditty box, and in their time play many parts.

There was, among the personnel of the *Fox*, an untried and probably erroneous theory that, in the likely event of *The Sheikh* sinking, one day, at her moorings, the guns would serve yet another useful purpose—that of life-buoys, as they floated away.

As the dhow opened up the tiny cove, Wendover stared in pleased amazement at the little town basking beneath its great protecting cliffs in the shadow of the two mediæval European castles that towered above it. Those incredible Portuguese . . .

Not long ago he had gazed in wonder at their great

Fort at Mombasa ; and now here, in this waterless sun-blasted corner of Arabia, were castles straight from Portugal, irresistibly reminding him of Cintra, as he tried to imagine stout Albuquerque and his men, clad in steel helmet and breast-plate, in heavy leather and thick silk, labouring, marching and fighting in that appalling heat.

As he gazed, he idly wondered how many of the scores and scores of the cannon that were visible, still glowering through their embrasures, would carry a ball from the castle to the water.

Later he visited the castles, and in the one called Fort Jellali, saw cannon of Albuquerque's own day, on which were clearly visible the Royal Arms of Portugal.

Others that interested him almost as much were British guns, one or two of them, to his surprise, bearing the Royal Crown of England and the monogram C.R. What untold tale of mighty venture, of shipwreck or pirate capture, did those guns of the days of Charles I or Charles II tell? Guns, the roar of which great Admiral Blake might have heard ; guns whose smoke might have been seen by Van Tromp himself when "*I've a broom at the mast,*" said he. The very gun on which Wendover laid his hand might have put a ball into more than one Barbary corsair, and into Algiers itself. Or again, the Royal Lord High Admiral and Warden of the Cinque Ports, James, Duke of York, afterwards James II, King of England, might have stood by this very gun which Wendover now touched, when James fought and beat de Ruyter . . .

Anyway, there it stood on the walls of Fort Jellali in Muscat, a gun cast in England in the seventeenth cen-

ture, a gun that had crossed the seas, defending one of the Wooden Walls of England, and manned by the iron men that took those wooden ships around the world—under incredible conditions horrible to contemplate.

Richard Wendover sighed as he turned from the gun. His England . . .

To the *killadar*, the custodian of the Fort, by whose favour he and Shere Khan were taken over it, and who had himself actually been a Subedar in the Indian Army, he observed in Hindustani:

“Different guns to-day, Subedar Sahib.”

“*Béshak*,” smiled the old man. “They tell me that the guns on the King Emperor’s ship, the *Fokkus*, will hit a target five *kos*¹ distant.”

“Wah! wah!” ejaculated Gul Mahommed, duly impressed.

From the deck of the dhow as she crept to her anchorage, Wendover could see watch-towers that reminded him of the Corsair watch-towers of the Mediterranean, dotted about the tops of the low mountains surrounding the town, watch-towers which, he surmised, had been erected to keep ward against the predatory Arab bands of the desert hinterland.

A few minutes before mid-day, the clumsy anchor, with its futile-looking cable of palm-fibre rope, was cast overboard a few fathoms from the blinding white walls of official buildings, go-downs, and old balconied Arab houses rising sheer from the water.

Going ashore with the other financiers of the rifle, slave, hashish and pearl businesses, Wendover found the town of Muscat as disappointing as is every port that

¹ One *kos* = two miles.

is admirable from the sea ; and reflected that the contrast between the view of a city from a ship, compared with the appearance of that city as seen from its own streets, is not unlike the difference between the front and the back of a picture.

The streets of Muscat he found to be poisonously foul, the denizens of its bazaars repulsively filthy and indeed filthily repulsive, quite the ugliest people he had yet seen in bulk, far uglier than either the original negro slaves from whom they are descended or their Arab owners.

As in no other part of Arabia or Africa with which he was familiar, here the admixture of Arab blood, instead of improving the negro strain, seemed definitely to have degraded it.

And he decided that the marked difference between the black Muscatis and the Swahilis of Africa—equally Arab-negro in origin—must be due to local in-breeding, the average Swahili, though no beauty, being a fine fellow, markedly superior in every way to the Negro, with thinner lips, finer nose, straighter hair, more dignified presence and carriage, and more nearly approximating to the Arab than to the aborigine.

Not only were the town and the people disgustingly dirty, but the whole place stank abominably, a fact only partly attributable to masses of ancient unsold and superfluous tunny and other fish rotting about the landing-places.

Having accompanied Messrs. Moron (*sous ce nom là !*) and Lobo, who by reason of the yellowish tinge of their swarthy faces assumed almost European airs of superiority, to the house of the wealthy Mekrani—the principal irons in whose many fires were fire-irons

indeed—and been introduced as gentlemen from Afghanistan and the Border, deeply interested in that particular class of iron, Gul Mahommed and Shere Khan found themselves warmly welcomed, invited to regard their host's house and all in it as their own, to attend that night a rice-and-mutton feast, and only then to fatigue their noble minds with business.

A stroll round the town of Muscat was a pleasure that Wendover had no wish to repeat, though the visit to the two castles was, as has been said, deeply interesting. So was the ancient wall surrounding the town, with its two gates, Big Gate and Little Gate, the former of which opens to the mouth of a pass whence set forth, and whither arrive, all the caravans slowly and silently journeying to and from the mysterious and almost unknown interior of Arabia.

It was a new experience for Wendover, to find himself in a walled city of which the gates were locked at night, and from the summit of whose surrounding hill-tops watchmen on the towers, in powerful voices like those of Muezzins, called regularly from time to time and from one to another; the deep diapason of their mournful voices reminding the dwellers of the town that all was well—but at any moment might be far otherwise.

A mediæval touch indeed, and probably an unbroken connecting-link with mediæval times.

§ 2

Listening most attentively to the conversation of his associates, and asking questions in Hindustani, Swahili and Pushtu, of Yacoub Ali, the Mekrani pro-

prietor of the establishment that was part hotel, part wholesale-business premises, part clearing-house, part conspirators' meeting-place and part plain rifle-shop, Wendover learned that Yacoub Ali's establishment was only one of a dozen small-arms and ammunition stores and depôts ; that every other shop was a gun-shop ; and that the Customs House, in spite of constant and copious withdrawals, was kept full to bursting-point by the almost daily delivery of huge consignments of rifles from Europe and principally from France ; that the customers were mainly Afghans, Baluchis and Pathans ; while the delivery agents were the bold resourceful Arab *naukhadas* of the gun-running fleet of dhows plying between Muscat and the little ports and harbours of the opposite Persian Mekran coast.

The Ghilzais of Central Asia were perhaps the best middlemen purveyors ; while notable and invaluable purchasers, local agents, retailers and depôt owners on the other side of the Gulf were the excellent Mir Barkat Khan, formerly Governor of Biyaban, and the noble Mullah Khan Mahommed of Karkindar (known to all Persia, Mekran, Baluchistan, Afghanistan and the Frontier as " The Khalifa Sahib ").

Better progress in the pursuit of information he made when, at Yacoub Ali's house, he was introduced to a very interesting, a literally intriguing, Armenian gentleman, a Monsieur Mamoulian, who was Muscat agent for the notable, not to say notorious, French rifle-merchants, Messrs. Goguyer et Fils, who openly, frankly, freely, without let or hindrance, *sans peur et sans reproche*, exported discarded French Army and other rifles from Marseilles to Djbouti, and imported them thence to Muscat.

The Armenian, a travelled and enlightened man, speaking, in addition to his own Armenian, Syrian Arabic, fluent French, good Turkish, good Hindustani, fair English and Persian, soon made all things abundantly clear to Gul Mahommed, new recruit to the ranks of the arms traffickers, intelligent, travelled and reputedly wealthy, a man who in addition to his own Pushtu, spoke fluent Hindustani, a little French and quite comprehensible English.

In bazaar Hindustani they came to a complete understanding, making all things abundantly clear; and it did not surprise the Armenian that, when in doubt and anxious to understand exactly, his Pathan friend resorted to English, inasmuch as that typical tribesman had, on his own confession, served in the British Army and sojourned long in British India.

Naturally he would learn some English, reflected Monsieur Mamouliau, and understand it a great deal better than he spoke it.

To Gul Mahommed, so intelligent, travelled, and interested in affairs, he merrily explained the local situation, which was truly Gilbertian.

There, as Gul Mahommed could see, lay His Britannic Majesty's cruiser *Fox*, stationed in Muscat harbour for the sole and specific purpose of preventing the export of rifles from Muscat to the Persian coast.

There, on the quay, as Gul Mahommed could see, was the Customs House, bulging with rifles and issuing them on demand all day long.

And not only was the Customs House bursting with rifles and ammunition, but there, as he or anybody else who chose to stroll along could observe, was the whole of the Customs House quay, littered, cluttered and

covered with great wooden crates, piled up one upon the other, each one filled with rifles or with the cartridges that fitted them.

And further, anyone interested was at complete liberty to go and watch dhow after dhow being loaded far above where her Plimsoll mark should be, with the said rifles and ammunition, under the very bows of the *Fox* and the noses of her personnel.

But the British being British, smiled Monsieur Mamouliau, and such wonderful sticklers for law, treaty rights, and the sanctity of agreements, they did absolutely nothing at all about it!

In Muscat harbour, that is to say.

For Muscat harbour belongs to the Sultan of Muscat, ally of Britain, friend of the Government of India and, occasionally, host of the Viceroy himself.

No, what goes on in Muscat harbour is not to be noticed by the Captain of a British cruiser, even though he be sent there on purpose to stop precisely what is going on. Anything that he is going to do must be done outside the three-mile limit of territorial waters, where no offence can be given to the tender susceptibilities of the Sultan of Muscat by the seizure of a dhow manned by people who may or may not be subjects of his, and who are engaged in carrying contraband to the enemies of Britain.

And even there, again smiled Monsieur Mamouliau, the impeccably correct British are in a difficulty, for a greater than the Sultan of Muscat then comes into the matter; no less a person than *Madame la République* of France.

For between France and Muscat there had long ago been made, with the knowledge and consent of Eng-

land, a treaty permitting Muscat to be used by France as a shop and a depôt and clearing-house for her considerable and valuable arms-traffic.

Unlike the British with their microscopic army, Monsieur Mamouliau pointed out, the French have a standing army that runs into millions ; so that when they shed the Chassepôt and the Gras there is something more than a few hundred perfectly good guns for sale ; and it is useless for Me-srs. Goguyer et Fils or any other enterprising contractors to bid for fifty thousand, one hundred thousand, half a million or a whole million of good army rifles, if there is no sale for them. Let the Government guarantee the market and the *entrepreneur* will buy their guns.

“ But since Britain became responsible for peace and order on the present North-West Frontier, and for the protection of the people of British India, has nothing been done about this treaty and understanding between France and Muscat ? ” asked Gul Mahommed.

“ Oh, yes,” replied Monsieur Mamouliau, “ up to the time of the Tirah campaign the arms traffic had been with Persia and the Arabs of the Gulf ; but when the British found that their soldiers were being shot down with French rifles, and they traced the sale of them to the Mekran and Persian coast, and across to Muscat, they got the Sultan to agree to allow British men-of-war to search dhows flying the Muscat or Persian or British flags, all of which they used to fly—especially British—the funny fellows.

“ But when the British gunboat *Lapwing* began seizing the dhows of poor *naukhadas* flying the Union Jack and taking the rifles out of the holds and the bread out of the *naukhadas*’ mouths, they refused to fly the flag of

such treacherous people any more ; and as the British did just the same in the case of the Persian and Muscat flags, the *naukhad*as, specially permitted by the Sultan of Muscat—himself by no means uninterested in the arms business—decided to fly the flag of France.

“ They did—and under this flag they were safe. Every dhow which the British overhauled thenceforth hailed from the French-protected port of Sur, or said it did, and flew the French flag.

“ So there was nothing for the British Government to do but to approach the French Government and see about the abrogation of the treaty which allowed Muscat to be a gun-shop, and the amphibian inhabitants of the port of Sur to be French subjects.

“ But, as the French Government very properly replied to the British Government, they had a perfect right to sell their discarded rifles to any brisk and enterprising French business men who chose to buy them, and the brisk and enterprising French business men had a perfect right to export them to the Republic’s colony of French Somaliland.

“ And what happened to the rifles thereafter was no business of theirs or of *Madame la République*.

“ And if other brisk and enterprising business men chose to sell them to the Sultan of Muscat, that again was no business of *Madame la République*.

“ And if there they were bought by Arabs, Persians, or the Mekranis—or by Eskimos, Red Indians, Hairy Anus, Australian Aborigines, the head-hunters of Borneo or the Chinese Emperor, that again was not of the faintest interest to *Madame la République*.

“ Surely while a gun is a gun and a shop is a shop, a man can go into a shop and buy a gun, can’t he ?

And the Emperor of China, the head-hunter of Borneo, the Red Indian, the Hairy Anu, the Aborigine of Australia, or the Eskimo has as much right to buy a gun as any good Briton has, *hein*?

“ ‘ Yes, but they are being bought by our enemies, the tribesmen of our Indian Frontier,’ said the British Government.

“ ‘ Now isn’t that just too bad!’ said the French Government. And while far too polite to offer unwanted advice, undoubtedly implied that somebody ought to keep those rascals in better order.”

“ And so that was the end of the matter, eh? ” observed the intelligent Gul Mahommed.

“ Yes, except that France, always with an eye to the main chance, offered to exchange her perfect right to sell arms to the Sultan of Muscat for, say, Nigeria, or even perhaps Ashanti, or possibly Sierra Leone—at which the British Government smiled, and sent the *Fox* to watch the arms traffic whereby her enemies are provided with rifles as good as her own.

“ And there you see His Britannic Majesty’s cruiser *Fox*—watching.”

“ But something is done about it, surely? ” enquired Gul Mahommed.

“ Oh, yes. Quite a lot, out at sea. Quite a lot. Every now and then she catches some poor fellow with a dhow-load of rifles and ammunition, who can’t prove that Sur is his place of clearance and that he has any right to fly the French flag. Then overboard goes the lot. And on board the *Fox* goes the poor *naukhada*.”

“ But such dhows surely don’t sail out from here under the eyes of the Captain of the *Fox*, quite openly, do they? ” asked Gul Mahommed.

"Oh dear, no. While the *Fox* is here, the gun-running dhows put out from other places along the Pirate Coast; and when she gets intelligence concerning them and steams out, then away goes the Muscat fleet in seven different directions, and many of them are quite safe to reach Gwada, Tiz, Kunarak, Puzin, Rashid, Gurdim, Rapch, Hushdan, Bunji or Kuhistak."

"No, of course the ship cannot be in two places, or go in two different directions at once," agreed Gul Mahommed.

"You'd think not, but in a manner of speaking that is just what she does do, curse her," smiled Monsieur Mamouliau.

"Oh, how?"

"Why, she gets over to the Mekran coast, and then puts down about a dozen boats, and off they go independently. Each of these, with an officer and a dozen men, hangs about the places I have mentioned, and lies in wait for the poor dhow; and what can a *nauk-hada* and half a dozen boatmen do against these fellows with their rifles and bayonets?"

"Not but what they get a bad time up the creeks sometimes," laughed Monsieur Mamouliau, "when the *shumal* is blowing, and they have to go close inshore. Sometimes they have to choose between a storm at sea and a hail of bullets from the land.

"But plenty of rifles still get across?" said Gul Mahommed.

"Oh, yes. About thirty thousand a year, what with the dhows that dodge the boat-cruisers and those that legitimately fly the French flag. Oh, yes, plenty get across, but the trade is not what it was, not by a long way."

"The British Navy ships frighten capital away, eh?" observed Gul Mahommed.

"Well, there's still plenty of capital in the business. It's the *naukhadas* that are the trouble. Not enough of them willing to take the risks."

"Do they work on a commission basis, then?"

"No, not exactly. Up till recently, the arrangement was that the financier gave the *naukhada* a lump sum in hire, and a third of what his dhow was worth, cash down, with a promise to pay the other **two-thirds** if the ship were captured, or sunk. But **they** won't do it now, in spite of enormous rates for freightage. They want the whole value of the dhow in advance, to be returned when the dhow does. But it doesn't—naturally. As soon as the *naukhada* has got the value of his ship, off he goes, of course, to Zanzibar or the Red Sea or somewhere, and is never seen in the Persian Gulf again.

"One good business man did it in Bushire, then came down here and did it again, and then sailed off for Mom-basa or somewhere, with double the value of his dhow in his pocket! No, the trade isn't what it was. And the only way the dealer can be quite sure of a *naukhada*, is to agree to his terms and then go across with him. But that's very unpleasant, of course, because then the dealer is just as liable to capture as anybody else."

"Very unpleasant," said Gul Mahommed, who hadn't the slightest desire to be captured by the British Navy in the act of gun-running, co-operating with arms-smugglers, aiding and abetting those who were engaged in supplying contraband of war to the King's enemies, active or potential, on the North-West Frontier of

India. It wouldn't look well, in view of his position as a disgraced and ruined outcast.

"I want to go across with a parcel, myself," he said.

"You'd be all right if you went with Ilderim Durani, the friend of Yacoub Ali the Mekrani. He'll be taking a big consignment over soon, along with some Powindahs. If you can get a passage with him, that is. His boats are always frightfully crowded."

"Why?"

"Well, Ilderim Durani, who is a very wily man indeed, is one of the people to whom the Sultan of Muscat has sold the right to fly the French flag."

"The right?"

"Oh, yes; absolutely. Treaty right between the Sultan and the French. Certain subjects of the Sultan have as much right to fly the French flag as the *Fox* has to fly the British; and under it they are absolutely safe from molestation. If they are challenged and searched, they produce their papers, and it would be an international incident if they were in any way molested. The good Ilderim has made himself one of those 'subjects' of the Sultan by right of purchase."

"*With a great sum obtained I this freedom,*" thought Gul Mahommed.

Monsieur Mamouliau removed the mouthpiece of his hookah from his lips and laughed.

"Do you know that Ilderim Durani's father actually prosecuted the British Government when the *Lapwing* took two hundred and twenty cases of arms and ammunition off his dhow?" continued Monsieur Mamouliau.

"He won his case, too, in the High Court of Justice at Bombay. He won his case there, but the Government

of India appealed to the British House of Lords and it was reversed, on some technical ground or other. But none of the people to whom the Sultan has given—or rather sold—the right to fly the French flag has been interfered with since.”

“ Well, I had better go in one of his boats if I can, then,” said Gul Mahommed.

“ Yes. I’ll speak to Yacoub Ali for you, and he will see whether Ilderim Durani can give you a passage. You will have to pay, of course, and Ilderim won’t carry your rifles.”

“ No, I suppose not,” agreed Gul Mahommed, who, in point of fact, was quite sure that Ilderim Durani would carry no rifles belonging to Gul Mahommed.

And after enjoying yet more of the conversation and the excellent coffee and tobacco of Monsieur Mamoulia, Gul Mahommed said a very friendly farewell and returned to the house of Yacoub Ali the Mekrani, where Shere Khan took his ease and gossiped with fellow Pathans who, though not of his tribe, were of his nation and knew his part of the Khyber country.

And that night the obliging Yacoub Ali introduced Shere Khan and his surly brother Gul Mahommed to Ilderim Durani, one of his most respected customers, a man known and feared from Muscat to Kabul; a friend and business associate of Persian Governors, Baluchi Sirdars, Bakhtiari Chiefs, influential Mullahs and other men of light and leading in the great gun-running industry of Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier of India.

CHAPTER IV

ON the terribly hot and extremely uncomfortable voyage from Muscat across the Gulf of Oman to the mouth of the Rapch River, a river which sometimes lacks the important element of water, Gul Mahommed realized that, but for Shere Khan, he would have been in an awkward and, indeed, highly dangerous situation.

For the extremely suspicious Afghans, Ghilzais and Pathan dealers and traders in guns were obviously somewhat puzzled by his boorish taciturnity and avoidance of confidences, or even conversation, concerning his own private business or their own, the engrossing and only subject that interested them.

Frequently, when asked a question, he would make no reply whatsoever; and from time to time, in spite of this guarded economy of speech, he displayed an ignorance somewhat surprising.

However, Shere Khan, while completely failing to make his fellow-tribesman popular or entirely satisfactory, saved the situation by tapping his forehead significantly and explaining that he had always been like that. It was his nature *to*. Always the poor Gul Mahommed had been *bé-wakuf* and *bé-ukl*, just slightly afflicted of Allah.

Oh, afflicted of Allah, was he? Poor fellow. That accounted for everything. And though not an ex-

planation to evoke sympathy from men who knew not the meaning of the kindly word, it was sufficient to account for and excuse his undeniable queerness.

Yes, he had been like that from childhood, explained Shere Khan, and moreover had had very bad luck. It had been his deplorable *kismet* to have had concussion of the brain, possibly caused through his head having been pounded, one day when he was sleeping, by an enemy, with a heavy rock. Never much of a brain, of course, but that hadn't done it any good.

And this Shere Khan's listeners could well understand, they having known several such cases of head-battering, a common if unpleasant trick of one's enemies who found one sleeping by the wayside. And that would account for his apparently capricious memory and those curious lapses during which he appeared to have forgotten things that he must have known—such as the importance and position of Bampur in Persian Baluchistan, and how at one time Ilderim Durani, Mir Barkat Khan and Mullah Khan Mahommed of Karkindar, all met there with a *lashkar* of four thousand Afghans, Ghilzais, Baluchis and Pathans, and cut up five miles of the Central Persian telegraph-line and raided Chabbar and Jask, shooting-up the telegraph stations, defying the Consular guards and wrecking the property of the British and Persian Governments alike, having a rare old time, and getting a bit of their own back on them for their high-handed, tyrannical and oppressive interference with the arms trade.

Was it not a shameful thing, asked Ilderim Durani of Gul Mahommed, that harmless and innocent Ghilzais could not buy guns from His Highness the Sultan of Muscat and take them in peace and safety across

the Persian Gulf and overland through Mekran and Baluchistan and Afghanistan, or through Persia, to their customers in Central Asia?

Most shameful, agreed Gul Mahommed.

It was to the Turcomans they sold their rifles; and what business was that of the British?

"What indeed?" murmured Gul Mahommed.

And what reason was there for the Persians of Kerman to butt in and make trouble? demanded Ilderim Durani.

"Obviously paid by the British to do so," observed Gul Mahommed.

Quite so. Quite so. Then there was that *bud-mash*, the British Consul-General in Meshed. Time somebody shoved a Khyber knife into his liver. He'd see about it himself next time he took that route to Merv for Samarcand, Bokhara, Khiva, Ferghana, Kohqand and Tashkent.

"Good business up that way still?" asked a Baluchi trader.

Fine. You could sell all the rifles and ammunition you could possibly take up there. Those Turcomans and Usbegs could never get enough. And the profits! And then the whole lot seized and confiscated after you had nursed your camels along for a thousand miles. Heart-breaking. Allah smite their souls to lowest hell.

"What does it matter to them how many rifles go into the Turcoman country, eh, Gul Mahommed?" growled Ilderim Durani.

"Nothing," agreed Gul Mahommed. "Just *zulm*."

"No, nor into Khorasan. What does it matter to them how many rifles there are in Herat?"

"Or in Gazhni," interrupted another.

"What has Khandahar to do with them?" asked a third.

"The fact is," said Ghulam Shah Powindah, "they've never forgiven the Ghilzais."

"For what?" asked Gul Mahommed, as the speaker was addressing him more particularly.

"For *what*?" ejaculated the man in obvious surprise.

"For Maiwand, he means," put in Shere Khan quickly, with a wink at Ghulam Shah Powindah as significantly he tapped his forehead. Obviously the poor Gul Mahommed's mind was wandering again.

"Oh, yes," said the latter. "Of course it was the Ghilzais who cut them up at Maiwand."

"I should say so," replied Ghulam Shah Powindah. "The Ghilzais and nobody else. There wasn't a Durani there. No, nor a Tajic. And none of your Pathans, either. It was our Ayub Khan and his Ghilzai *lashkar* who did it, near the Helmund River, opposite my own town of Girishk. Outflanked the British army and wiped out the whole brigade, and captured all their artillery; every gun they had got."

"After they had fired all their ammunition," observed Gul Mahommed.

"Well?"

"And after Shere Ali, the Wali of Kandahar, had treacherously deserted the British General so that he had to retreat to Khushk-i-Nakhud," he added.

"Well?"

"Why shouldn't Shere Ali betray the Infidel dogs and sons of dogs?" enquired Ilderim Durani.

"Because the British General, Burrows Sahib, had . . ." began Gul Mahommed.

"Peace! Peace!" interrupted Shere Khan. "Always must wrangle, mustn't you, Gul Mahommed, and say the opposite to everybody else."

"Don't argue with him," he added, turning to Ghulam Shah Powindah. "He's like that," and changed the subject to the more interesting one of the respective conveniences of the Western and Eastern routes through Persia and Baluchistan respectively to the Helmund Lake Road to Girishk, Kandahar and Gazhni.

And thus and similarly did Shere Khan, many a time and oft, stand between Gul Mahommed and the consequences of his ignorance or his folly.

§ 2

But, a few days after the dhow had reached Godoz, Shere Khan was unable to prevent an eruption of the smouldering volcanic temper of his friend and master, though no evil consequences followed. Nevertheless the incident troubled him as showing how much Gul Mahommed had to learn, both in self-control, habitude and experience, before he would be really safe in his rôle of Pathan.

For on their way from Godoz to the secret camp of the gun-runners, they encountered a British Officer. The British Officer accosted Gul Mahommed and, although Shere Khan promptly assumed the place of leader and answered the Officer in Pushtu, the latter addressed Gul Mahommed in English, and in that language the *soi-disant* Gul Mahommed replied . . .

And on the long and weary route from Godoz on

the Mekran coast to Duzdab in Persia, on the gun-runners' road to Afghanistan, Shere Khan, in season and out of season, bade Richard Wendover forget himself, his past and his language, and remember his new name, new personality, and his new tongue, even to the point of thinking in Pushtu, cursing in Pushtu, yea, and even counting in that language.

CHAPTER V

DUZDAB greatly interested Gul Mahommed and to a less extent, Shere Khan. A hard-baked—and as to its inhabitants, undoubtedly hard-boiled—sun-blistered, mud-coloured town consisting of thousands of houses of dried mud, surrounded by walls of dried mud and of hundreds of narrow, crooked, wandering streets and bazaars, the rutted roads of which were of dried mud, save in the rainy season when they were of wet and very deep mud.

A strange place, inexplicable in its being there in the heart of a Persian desert, a microcosm of the Middle East, a *mélange* of its people, creeds and castes. A somewhat Holy City, and quite deserving of its name of Duzdab which, being interpreted, meaneth *The Drinking-place of the Thieves* or *The Robbers' Water-Hole*, since it is something of a nest of robbers and undoubtedly a place where water of a kind is fairly easily procurable.

Nor can it be supposed that its honourable name of Robbers' Roost is due to the fact that it is a depôt on the great arms-smuggling route from the Persian Gulf to the North-West Frontier of India, inasmuch as its name is as old as Iran, as old as ancient Persia, whereas the great and profitable gun-running industry dates back no further than the invention of the grooved gun-barrel.

And thither arrived from the North the purchasers of rifles, and thither from the South come the importers and vendors of the admired and desired weapons, which though discarded and rejected of Europe are to the Tribesmen infinitely preferable to the home-made weapons of the Kabul gun-makers' bazaar or of the Afghan Government arsenal.

Here, from the North and East, Gul Mahommed and Shere Khan met men from all the tribes of near-by Afghanistan ; Duranis, Hazaras, Kafirs, Ghilzais, Usbegs, Tajics and Turcomans ; men from Kabul, Khandahar, Jellalabad and Herat ; men from every tribe of the North-West Frontier of India ; Afridis, Mahsuds, Mohmands, Zakka Khel and their great enemies the Kuki Khel, Shinwaris, Turis, Orakzai, Khostwals, Waziris and every other kind of Pathan ; as well as Baluchis, Bokharans, Mekranis, Persians, Indian Mussulmans, Hindus and Sikhs.

To Gul Mahommed it appeared that there were two lines of business which occupied the time and energies of the visitors to the lively city of Duzdab ; the rifle trade and seditious intrigue ; while the permanent residents flourished more or less by taking in each others' washing.

In their capacity of wandering and intelligent der-vishes, Gul Mahommed and Shere Khan held converse upon Religion and other subjects, with Christians ; Mussulmans, both Shiah and Sunni ; Brahmins ; Buddhists ; Hindus of a dozen castes ; Sikhs ; Zoroastrians ; Baha'is ; Jews, Turks and Infidels. Different sorts of Christians were represented by Catholic and Protestant missionaries, Armenians, a Nestorian, a Russian and a Greek ; Mussulmans of both creeds by Persians,

Afghans, Pathans and Indians ; Buddhism by a trio of unexplained and inexplicable Japanese and a pair of equally incredible Chinese. Each of these two groups of Far Easterners seemed to Gul Mahommed to have no concern save deep concern concerning the doings of the other.

In their capacity of wandering and intelligent lay agitators, apparently desirous of agitating anybody and everybody about anything and everything, they held converse upon politics with Anglophobe Afghans ; seditious Indians ; anti-monarchical Persians who abhorred the heavy hand of the Shah ; intriguing Afghan refugees from the mercy of the Amir ; agents of Moscow deeply interested in all who were interested in undermining the power of any neighbouring ruler, be he Shah, Amir or King-Emperor, and detesting them all equally and alike ; politically-conscious Persian mullahs who foamed at the mouth as they spoke of the evil done by the godless infidel Soviet in the holy Mussulman cities which had fallen into their power, such as Samarcand, Khiva and Bokhara. Was it not notoriously true that they had turned the holiest and most ancient mosques into warehouses, stables, dance-halls, picture-palaces and worse ?

A seething hot-bed of political intrigue, this town of Duzdab, most of which plotting was directed against Britain ; a congeries of subversive and seditious societies, the largest and most active of which was directed against the British Raj and consisted of Hindu, Mussulman and other Indians, the most numerous of whom were Sikhs. These brave bearded and burly men were mainly artisans, excellent repairers of rifles

and of disintegrating motor-cars by day; repairers of the ancient Sikh Kingdom and destroyers of the disintegrating British Empire by night.

And from them, as from the rest, Gul Mahommed learned much.

And much of what he learned he set forth on paper; and the paper, by curious and devious ways, he despatched to Peshawar, Quetta or Dera Ismail Khan, whence it was forwarded to Simla and there studied with great interest and considered with the greatest care by Colonel Ormesby of the Political Department.

This new and unknown Secret Service agent was working—and working to some purpose, by Jove—in Duzdab now, of all places on this earth—and sending invaluable information concerning not only the gun-running business but the plot-hatching industry as well.

§ 2

“Hullo, what’s up?” said Gul Mahommed to Shere Khan, in English, the speaking of which was a foolish practice of which he had not yet completely broken himself, as, turning a corner of the street that led from their caravan-serai outside Duzdab to the central market-place, they beheld a large crowd about the beautiful new gallows, lofty and commodious, a gift from the Shah, commemorating his recent visit to his loyal and loving citizens of Duzdab.

Shere Khan remonstrated with him in much the words that he himself had used when rebuking Shere Khan for addressing him as *Huzoor*, a habit of which even yet he was scarcely cured.

"Seem to be hanging somebody," Gul Mahommed answered his own question.

"One Duzdabi scoundrel the less," shrugged Shere Khan indifferently. "Let's go and watch."

"I'm not really very fond of watching executions," said Gul Mahommed.

"No? I rather like them," was the reply. "Especially when it's one of these down-country scum."

"You ought to accustom yourself to watching all sorts of funny things," he added. "You'll certainly see some in Kabul and up north, whether you wish to or not."

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," paraphrased Gul Mahommed sententiously in Pushtu.

"We may have to watch each other hanging, for all we know," observed Shere Khan, whose humour was apt to be grim. "Or rather, one of us, in disguise, may have to watch the other being hanged—and without turning a hair or blinking an eyelid."

"Oh, I could do that quite easily," replied Gul Mahommed in Shere Khan's happiest vein.

"Oh, man, what's all the hanging about?" the latter asked of a passing Afghan.

"Pies," replied the honest tradesman.

"What, been making heavy pastry? Serve him right," decided Shere Khan censoriously.

"Well no, the objection was not exactly to the pastry so much," replied the Afghan, scratching industriously beneath his huge turban.

"Oh, tough mutton? Serve him right again, then. Hanging's too good for these street-corner swine. The other day I bought a *shahi's* worth of *kaibobs* from one of them and was swindled both ways, quantity and

quality. Tough meat and not enough of it. And I doubt if it was mutton."

"This fellow's wasn't," growled the Afghan. "Wasn't mutton at all."

"What then? Dog?" grinned Shere Khan.

"No. Man. And the Judge sentenced him to be hanged for dishonesty, this dirty swindler," replied the Afghan as he turned away to go about his business.

"Well, I'm damned," observed Gul Mahommed, again in English.

"I wish you would not talk English, Gul Mahommed," smiled Shere Khan. "Not that anybody in this Allah-forgotten dust-heap would know it was English, but still . . ."

"Do you think it was true?" interrupted Gul Mahommed.

"What?"

"About the human flesh."

"Why not? Is there anything a Persian wouldn't do? They really are the very best swindlers in Asia. Afghans are children to them."

"But is such a thing possible? I say—have you bought any mutton-pies at the street corner or . . .?"

"No. I got everything from the *serai*-keeper. Ours has been mutton all right—when it wasn't goat. You can see the joints and watch them being cooked. No, I don't think I bought anything in the street except fruit and *hulwa*. Only now and again, anyway. Let's go and have a look at him. I should recognize him if I . . ."

"Yes, if that's what he has been doing—and

selling. I don't at all mind watching him get what . . ." said Gul Mahommed.

" But no," he interrupted himself, " it isn't possible. Where would he get the . . . meat ? "

" I'll ask," said Shere Khan.

And not only from gossips of the bazaar, but from men who had known the vendor, the purchasers, and the prosecutor, men who had been present in the Qadi's court, it was apparently only too true that the enterprising pie-man had caused quite a considerable number of the citizens of Duzdab unconsciously to become anthropophagi; cannibals.

As is apt to happen when business men quarrel, more had been divulged than either intended, when the grave-digger employed at the latest burial-ground and the itinerant restaurateur had quarrelled over the sordid matter of prices and payments, the peculiarly filthy lucre offered by the delicatessen-merchant being less than that promised to the obliging and helpful sexton.

In spite of peremptory request that Shere Khan would not go into further detail, Gul Mahommed learned that corpses, particularly those of children, buried by day, had been exhumed by night.

" That's enough, Shere Khan," said he, as, at dinner that night, his friend, with mordant wit and ghoulish humour, told the obviously true tale that he had learned in the bazaar.

" Why didn't they hang the grave-digger, too ? " asked Gul Mahommed.

" When the grave-digger heard that the police had arrested the pie-man, he took his annual holiday at once. I suppose he thought that they would consider

him to be as dishonest a grave-digger as the other was a dishonest pie-man."

"*Dishonest!*" growled Gul Mahommed.

"Thoroughly," agreed Shere Khan. "It was dishonesty, wasn't it? Have some more mutton?"

"No, thank you."

§ 3

And in due course, and by wanderings the tale of which would fill a book, Gul Mahommed and Shere Khan made their devious way to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan.

CHAPTER VI

IN Kabul, Gul Mahommed had long and most interesting conversations with assorted gentlemen interested in the small-arms and ammunition business, buyers and sellers of rifles who knew to a farthing the buying-price to offer and the selling-price to ask, for every kind of rifle, from a new British short .303 to a Belgian flintlock ; interested also in the various kinds of ammunition pertaining to such arms of precision and lack of precision ; chiefly Afghans, Ghilzais, Powindahs and every sort and kind of Pathan.

Also with others interested less in rifles and ammunition than in the objects of their use and in those who use them, chiefly Russians, Anglophobe Kabuli mullahs, seditious Sikhs, " Hindustani fanatics " or Sitana, Mussulman and Hindu seditionists, and certain notorious outlaws who had fled from Border justice to the protection of the Amir.

To Gul Mahommed and to his brother and apparent business-partner, Shere Khan, these various and extremely varied people, sooner or later, talked more or less freely, as to fellow gun-runners or fellow-seditionists and plotters, as the case might be.

To such a person as the notorious Powindah Mullah the Second, bitter enemy of the British and of anybody else whose influence might lead eventually to the enlightenment of the people and the weakening

of the power of the priests, the two were political agents and emissaries interested only in the fomentation of trouble, the carrying of verbal messages too important and dangerous to be written, the representatives of those whose aim and work in life was the destruction of the British Raj.

To such people as the son of Mir Barkat Khan, once Governor of Biyaban, chief of the gun-running profiteers ; or the brother of Mullah Khair Mahommed, known as the Kafilah Sahib, powerful and professional importer of rifles, the two were representatives and agents of the most important gun-purchasing agency on the Border, men who knew the gun-running business from top to bottom and the salesmanship side of the industry equally well.

And thus it was that the frequent, almost regular, letters from Kabul and elsewhere which reached Colonel Ormesby of the Political Department in Simla, were remarkably interesting and extremely welcome. Before long, he came to accept every statement made therein as reliable ; every forecast as extremely likely to prove accurate ; and every piece of advice as worthy of his careful attention and consideration.

Using the letters to check the reports of his known-and-own Secret Service agents, he found them invaluable ; and quickly came to the conclusion that where they differed from the official reports, the latter were almost invariably inaccurate. His unknown correspondent, signing himself John Smith, writing in excellent English, and occasionally using French for dispatches containing information particularly important and secret, provided him not only with first-hand

accurate and early information, but with one of the puzzles of a lifetime.

Who could he be ?

Why was he working as he did ?

And what earthly reason could there be for his not coming to Simla or Delhi, and making himself known to Colonel Ormesby, entering the Secret Service, receiving salary, rank and appointment, and generally regularising his position ?

Who and what on earth could the fellow be ?

One thing he was—the most amazingly well-informed, active and acutely observant commentator upon current affairs that Colonel Ormesby had encountered.

Only he had not encountered him, and that was the pity.

§ 2

And from Kabul, Gul Mahommed and Shere Khan again set forth upon a journey so long, so adventurous and so interesting, that the tale only of their experiences on the long gun-runners' road from Kabul to the outer confines of the country of the Turcomans and on and on until they heard Russian speech, would fill yet another book.

And keeping ever northward and somewhat westward towards the Kazak country, they at last reached the town of Orenburg ; and thence, travelling westward, came by way of the Ural River to Uralsk ; and journeying on again, one day beheld from a hill-top, the waters of the Volga River ; and embarking on a river-boat, came, in a great and restful peace, by way

of Nikolaievskoi, by Kamishindubovka and Tcherniyar to Astrakan ; and thence by little rusty steamer down the Caspian Sea to Baku ; and from Baku they journeyed, with difficulty and hardship, to Tabriz, from Tabriz to Teheran, from Teheran to Meshed, from Meshed to Herat, and so from Herat once more to Kabul.

And in every place in which they sojourned, Gul Mahommed and Shere Khan, with widely-opened ears and closely-shut mouths, heard the talk of the bazaars and *serais*, as with keen-glancing though well-veiled eyes, they strove to behold all things of interest, that it was possible for them to see.

And from every single place in which they sojourned, Gul Mahommed wrote letters to India, most of which, though not in chronological order of writing, reached Colonel Ormesby of the Intelligence Department.

And at Kabul, the day dawned for Shere Khan, as it must for every Pathan, when the nostalgia for his own hills became too strong to be longer borne.

"Let's go home, Gul Mahommed," said he, as they sat in the courtyard of the house of Ilderim the Gun-runner.

"Home ? I have no home," replied Gul Mahommed.

"But I have, Friend of my Heart ; and my home is thy home ; my people thy people. Come there with me. We will arise and go to my father, the Khan Saheb of Khairastan, and I will say :

" ' Father, in this man, my brother, thou hast another son.' "

CHAPTER VII

CLAD in snowy white shirts, baggy trousers caught in at the ankle, gold-embroidered velvet waistcoats, and baggy turbans bound about their peaked conical *kullah* caps, Gul Mahommed and Shere Khan sunned themselves on a bench in a corner of the Khan of Khairastan's courtyard.

From time to time, Gul Mahommed yawned cavernously.

Shere Khan studied his beloved friend's face, sunburnt and seamed, with its thick black eyebrows, black beard and moustache, dark-brown eyes and aquiline nose, a strong and hawk-like countenance, hard and grim.

"You are all Pathan now, Gul Mahommed," he said, "and you have a home. In one year you have become a son of this House. My father the Khan would grieve if you left us. To my father you are a son, to my brothers a brother. You are a freeman of the Free Country now, a Tribesman and a Pathan."

"Not quite," smiled Gul Mahommed. "I can't sit on my heels. Not for long, or with any comfort."

"No. That's strange, isn't it? It is the most restful position there is, you know, to sit on your own heels with your arms stretched out straight and resting on your knees, the knees behind the unbending elbows, and the hands dangling."

"I prefer to lie flat."

"Much more dangerous."

"How?"

"Well, obviously your enemy can get at you better. You can't jump up so quickly, or sleep with one eye open; or shoot; or . . ."

"Shere Khan, I'm tired," interrupted Gul Mahommed.

"Well, try sitting on your heels."

"I mean I'm bored, weary, what's the word . . . I can only think of *ennuyé*, which is not good Pushtu. I love this place and I love the mountains. But I have sat here over-long, and I am weary."

"Well, there are two things to cure that," said Shere Khan weightily. "Love and war."

Gul Mahommed looked up quickly. Was this fortuitous, or had Shere Khan noticed anything? Was he toying with an idea?

"And horses," he added, "and ambition. But the less said about that the better."

"Well, three then, love and war and horses," amended Shere Khan.

"Yes. It has been said before. How does it go?"

"*Four things greater than all things are
Women and horses and power and war,*"

quoted Gul Mahommed, and translated.

"Yes? I should say love and war and then horses."

"No, you don't bother much about power up here, do you? A real democracy. You don't worry about the Captains and the Kings."

"No, we are all free men here. Each man's power is in his own right hand and right eye . . . Unless he shoots from the left shoulder," smiled Shere Khan.

"Women and horses and war," he mused. "Which of those would charm away your weariness best, Gul Mahommed, because any or all are . . ."

"You'd start a private war for my benefit, would you?"

"Why not? A word to the Khan and he'd order a raid against Dost Mahommed over the hills to the North there, or against Gazi-ud-din Haidar to the West; or you and I and a dozen or two of the young men could go off and join the Zakka Khel Afridis in their next raid against the Kuki Khel Afridis . . . I heard last night that they are fighting now, all up and down the Road—between the Zakka Khel villages and Ali Masjid, on the days when the Road is closed to the *kafilas* . . . Or the Kuki Khel would be very glad to have our help against the Zakka Khel . . . Or again, if you like, we could go to Dadi the Brigand or Usman the Outlaw and join them in a raid on Peshawar or somewhere . . . Oh, yes, we could have some fighting if you feel like a bit of war."

"Well, I'm not going to be captured and hanged raiding Peshawar with outlaws, my son."

"We might not be."

"And we might. And I don't know that I am keen on raiding Dost Mahommed or Gazi-ud-din Haidar. I wouldn't mind joining in with the Kuki Khel next time the Zakka Khel raid them. The Zakka Khel are too fond of it. Overdo it altogether. Damned bullies. I wish we could get a machine-gun into the next Kuki Khel village that they shoot up, and give the Zakka Khel a surprise."

"Well, the Kuki Khel are silly fools, anyway," shrugged Shere Khan. "Up near the Kohat Pass

there are two clans of the Kuki Khel forever fighting each other. Kill more of one another than the Zakka Khel do of them. They've both got some cannon ; something like those we saw at Muscat, you remember. And the two Khans spent half their income on gun-powder. The funny thing is, there are only forty-three cannon-balls left that fit those cannon. And when one side fires one, the other side all rush off and chase the ball, so as to be able to fire it back again. They are frightfully annoyed when one gets buried in the wall of the Fort."

"What's the 'war' about?" asked Gul Mahommed, yawning again.

"Oh, the origin is forgotten, of course, but it breaks out afresh whenever one side has got most of the cannon-balls, and enough powder to fire them. Then they bang away at each other, and the Zakka Khel hear the row, and come down in the middle of it, and take both sides in flank."

"Oh well, it's their own fault then. I'm not going to risk my life fighting for fools," said Gul Mahommed.

"Well, horses then. If you won't raid, will you ride?" asked Shere Khan.

"Where to?"

"End of the world."

"The Golden Road to Samarcand again, eh?"

"And Tashkent too? And cut Bailitzin's throat? Follow the *kafila* road to that place and kill him? Then to Samarcand. And Bokhara and Khiva. Or only just Tashkent again, if you like. Anywhere."

"It's an idea. It is an idea. The Golden Road to Samarcand. Romantic. Used to attract me when I

was a *butcha*.¹ No, I'd give all I've got, to meet Bailitzin just once again—but I don't think we'll show our noses near the Russian Officers' School of Oriental Languages at Tashkent again" he growled.

"Well. There's love, then, Gul Mahommed. Why not marry? It's time you saw some sons round your knees."

"Marry? Marry a Pathan girl? Who'd give a landless outlander his daughter?"

"I would. To you."

"Pity you haven't got any daughters, isn't it, Shere Khan!"

"I've got sisters."

"And you'd let one of your sisters marry me?"

"Let her? I'd tell her to, if you cast the eye of favour upon her."

"And your father, the old Khan?"

"He, too . . . I should think. He's old-fashioned, of course, and would have something to say concerning the modern girl and new-fangled ideas about marrying outside the Tribe. But he has the greatest admiration for you. Oh, yes. He'd agree. And in any case, he cannot live much longer, peace be upon him."

"It's an idea. It's an idea," said Gul Mahommed, again. "Marry a Patnan girl, eh? One of your sisters."

"Yes. It would be something to do," said Shere Khan. "Occupy your mind for a time, and then we could go riding or raiding. You could marry Zobeida or Zarah or Selima; or there's Zeinub or Miriam or Leila; and what about Mumtaz—she's all right.

¹ *Small boy.*

Or Bhabi—she's a good-tempered lass. Raisha's very well-behaved, too; but if I remember rightly, she squints."

"That is a drawback," admitted Gul Mahommed.

"Yes, they say that when a woman's eyes are crooked, her nature is crooked, too, and her character and all that. But I don't know. Raisha's all right. Not that she gets much chance to be otherwise; but you know what I mean, a woman might never glance outside the home but still be a damned nuisance in it, nagging and so on."

"What about little Bibi Jan?" asked Gul Mahommed.

"Our Jan Begum?" laughed Shere Khan. "Ah! . . . Daughter of my mother's cousin Ali Abdullah who was hanged in Peshawar? Now that *is* a girl. Lovely as a rose and brave as a lion. She ought to have been a boy."

"So I thought, when she was at the loop-hole the other night."

"Oh, good as a man at a loop-hole.

"Yes, Jan certainly ought to have been a boy," continued Shere Khan enthusiastically. "Full of spirit; and she's got the pluck of the devil. She'd make a fine wife. But I should be sorry for the husband who beat her."

"Stick a knife in him while he slept?" smiled Gul Mahommed.

"No, while he woke. She wouldn't wait for him to go to sleep. She'd stand up to him. She'd be faithful, too, and she wouldn't scold or nag . . . Nevertheless, if she thought you were a fool, she'd tell you so. Even if you were her husband."

Shere Khan, who had Pathan cunning in full measure, and excellent powers of observation, noticed that Gul Mahommed had ceased to yawn. Power, horses, war, love. In that order, they had interested him. Ah, there he was, talking English again. He'd regret that some day, though hitherto he had never made a slip and spoken English when anyone else was present . . .

*"Two things greater than all things are
The first is love and the second war,"*

mused Gul Mahommed.

Yes, he could quite imagine himself happy with Bibi Jan. For a time, at any rate. Doubtless she would pall after a while. They would have so little in common.

Of what could they talk together? No mutual sympathies, tastes, experience, background; nothing. When passion waned, would love wax? How could it? The love that wears and lasts and grows must be based on community of taste, outlook, standards, ideas. People who live happily together must laugh together, laugh at the same things; talk, discuss, compare; must have common ground on which to roam hand-in-hand.

Oh, Lord, what sentimental tripe!

But of what, then, did Pathan husbands talk with their wives? Didn't talk with them at all, probably. Well, neither did some European husbands so far as that went. Grunted from behind the newspaper when their wives tried to start some topic of conversation. How many European husbands, a year after the honeymoon, really conversed with their wives, discussed things with them, talked over the books they had

read, the plays they had seen, the places they had visited; discussed art, music, drama, philosophy, religion, politics, anything at all—except the quality of the breakfast bacon, the cost of frocks, and the size of household bills?

And probably the Pathan husband did the same—spoke to her of nothing at all except the quality of the dinner mutton, the cost of the new *sari* or bangle, and her extravagance with the *ghee*.

The honeymoon, "*Light of my life and moon of my desire that knowst no wane, I need no food save that of love which is the music of thy voice. Speak on,*" soon changes to, "*Hag, when will that mutton stew be ready? Hold your foolish tongue, and see there be more mint in the meat-balls this time.*"

Yes, to how many husbands, the world over, were their wives real companions and friends, on whichever side the fault might be? Precious few. So he need not let that worry him. Besides, since he was going to be a Pathan, live and die a Pathan, the best thing he could do would be to have a Pathan wife. He certainly would not have any other kind.

But, oh, Lord! . . . Baths . . . hair . . . odour . . . colour . . . habits . . .

But damn it all, he was going to be a Pathan himself. It was no good half-doing it. No good clinging to the belief that he, much less his wife, must follow every British tradition, custom, convention, habit, shibboleth.

If no Pathan considered a hot bath, or a cold one either, an integral part of his daily routine, did Wendover's great-grandfather, or grandfather, for that matter? Hadn't he heard his father say that there wasn't a single bathroom in the house in which he

was born? And as to the Noble Lords and Ladies of the Age of Chivalry, they probably had a bath as often as they got caught in a rain-storm.

No, there was no running h. and c. in the bed-sits of the Château Gaillard—or Whitehall Palace, for that matter. Were there any in the original Buckingham Palace?

In the old days, he had always despised and condemned those *soi disant* Sahibs who had anything to do with native women, whether as a resident "wife" or casually. Disgusting. But he had been intolerant and perhaps self-righteous in those days. Besides, this was entirely different. Bibi Jan would be his legal, lawful and permanent wife; as much his wife as—Sybil Ffoulkes would have become.

In point of fact, it would be a very sound thing to do, for it would put the final seal on his adoption of Pathan nationality; his repudiation of his British birth.

Yes, it would undoubtedly be a sound thing to do. It is not good to live alone.

It would be a gesture to himself as well as to others, a proof to himself that he really was a Tribesman now; a free unfettered hillman; a mountaineer of the Free Land; a Pathan by choice and adoption; naturalized; permanent; for life.

And his children . . . Oh, Lord! Children. Half-castes, like, yes, like the excellent Lieutenant Breckinge. Probably Captain or Major Breckinge by now.

Yes, half-castes. On the other hand, this again would be a very very different thing. They'd be of quite another breed from the Breckinges of this Eastern world. Very different from the sweeper-bred scum;

or the Portuguese-Indian-descended Goanese servants who are excellent people, of course, in their own walk of life, but . . .

Half-castes! Still, why not? What could be a finer cross than that between good British stock and good Pathan stock, with the virtues of both? How many fine men had been the sons of British officers and Afghan ladies—men who had risen to be Generals, Governors, men all the finer and stronger for the admixture of the blood of such fighting-stock as this.

But a native girl—instead of Sybil Ffoulkes!

And, in the end, Alexander Breckinge saved him, for he decided that, on the whole, he would not add any Eurasians to the world's stock thereof, would not provide himself with a half-caste son lest he grow up to be—a Breckinge.

§ 2

And so Shere Khan, who loved her, himself married Bibi Jan, according to Islamic law and Pathan custom.

In the biggest room of the house of Khan Khudadad Khan Hassan Ali Khan of Khairastan, Bibi Jan and her female relatives and other members of the household, stood upon a dais behind a curtain. Shere Khan, with Gul Mahommed in close support, stood on the other side of the curtain, while behind them, but not upon the dais, stood as many of the Khan's clansmen as could crowd into the hall.

All being ready on both sides of the curtain, nothing happened, as is usual in India and the parts thereunto adjacent.

After half an hour or so of uneasy shuffling, whisper-

ing, clearing of throats and general wedding-guest anticipatory activity, sudden alarms and excursions without announced the arrival of the officiating Mullah, an aged gentleman robed in a voluminous white beard and a black garment, a gaberdine which was a sort of cassock. Receiving the salutations of the faithful and returning their blessings, he made his slow way to the dais, where he took his place beside the bridegroom.

Here he prayed aloud, and then, facing the heavy curtain, cried three times :

“ Oh, Bibi Jan, kinswoman of Khan Khudadad Khan Hassan Ali Khan, do you, in the sight of Allah and this assembly gathered together, accept this man, Shere Khan, son of the great Khan Khudadad Khan Hassan Ali Khan of Khairastan, descendant of a long line of warriors, as your husband, with such dowry as he has undertaken to provide ? ”

And each time Bibi Jan replied “ Yes ” in a whisper modest and meek, but sufficiently audible withal.

And then again the Mullah, lifting up his surprisingly powerful *muezzin* voice, again asked thrice :

“ Oh, Shere Khan, son of the Great Khan Khudadad Khan Hassan Ali Khan of Khairastan, descendant of a long line of warriors, do you undertake to receive this woman, Bibi Jan, daughter of Ali Abdullah, as your wife, and to provide her with such dowry as has been agreed upon ? ”

And each time, in a strong voice, Shere Khan replied : “ Yes.”

And again the Mullah prayed aloud ; and then, turning to ~~the~~ the assembly on his side of the curtain, addressed them :

“ Men of the clan of the Khan of Khairastan, you

are witnesses in the sight of Allah and before me, the Mullah of Khairabad, that Bibi Jan, the daughter of Ali Abdullah, is this day married to Shere Khan, the son of Khan Khudadad Khan Hassan Ali Khan of Khairastan, according to Islamic Law and the custom of the Border. Pray with me that it may be the will of Allah that they dwell together in health and happiness and prosperity for the remainder of their long lives."

And with the invocation :

"The blessings of Allah upon this man and upon this woman," he pulled aside the curtain and revealed Bibi Jan and the women.

Bibi Jan, veiled, now stood face to face with Shere Khan, who took her hand, and turning, faced the assembled tribesmen.

These, placing their hands upon the hilts of their *tulwars* or their Khyber knives, declared themselves witnesses of the ceremony, friends and protectors of the bride and bridegroom, their willing defenders in time of strife and their helpers in the hour of trouble.

They then trooped out from the house into the courtyard to join the hundreds of wedding-guests who had been unable to crowd into the hall to witness the actual ceremony, fired a ragged *feu-de-joie*, shouted, cheered and sang, and then settled down to what was to them the really serious business of the day—the wedding-feast.

With brief intervals for rest, if not refreshment, the guests feasted for the remainder of the day and most of the night.

It was a memorable marriage-breakfast, with relay after relay of huge dishes piled with boiled roast mutton

and rice, with chickens, with vast mounds of pilau, consisting of saffron rice, sultanas, almonds, chopped meat, banana, pistachio nut and shredded onion ; most succulent dishes of that noble delicacy, the fat tails of fat-tailed sheep ; joints of roast mutton stuck full of cloves ; innumerable force-meat balls flavoured with mint, and as appetizers between meat courses, puddings of cream and sweetmeat, *hulwa*, mulberries, melons, walnuts, apples and oranges and other trifles of fruit and home-made preserves and confections of sugar.

And for many a day and week and month, clansman would say to clansman :

“ *Wah!* What a feast ! By Allah, I was ill. Lovely.”

And after the wedding, Shere Khan and Bibi Jan rode away to the fortified house with its loop-holed square of high walls and its strongly-built watch-tower that the Khan had placed at his disposal on a kind of feudal tenure, whereby he paid his father a nominal rent, a portion of the yield of the poor stony fields, and undertook to place himself and his servants at the Khan's disposal in time of war.

And, soon after, to dwell with him as friend and retainer and chief of his other retainers, came Gul Mahommed, whom Shere Khan so loved that he could not live happily away from him ; whom he so loved that he would have given him the girl Bibi Jan to be his wife, though her he also loved, and had for long hoped to marry.

CHAPTER VIII

THE *chowkidar*, in the watch-tower above the main gate of Khairabad Fort, challenged sharply, his quick ears having caught the sound of a rolling pebble. A high cracked wavering voice answered with a burst of what is best described as religious profanity, and a demand for the prompt opening of the wicket door of the great gate in the name of hospitality, of Allah, and of the Pir Saleh-ud-din Ali Moussa.

"And who the devil is he?" bawled the watchman into the night from whence came the high-pitched quavering cackle.

"One who'll blast the flesh from your bones, wither the hide from your flesh, and wish the hair from your hide. Aye, and smite the soul from your body and send it direct to the lowest floor of Hell."

"H'm," said the watchman. This was evidently a person to consider; and, clattering down the stair from his turret eyrie, he bade his two colleagues of the gate-guard to stand by with loaded rifles. Opening the little wicket in the guard-gate, and thrusting forth his rifle, he bade the alleged Pir approach, slowly, with raised hands—and alone.

Not particularly slowly, and without raised hands, though alone, a quaint figure of fun stepped over the high lintel of the wicket and into the light of the guard-lantern dimly burning.

"Yes, he's a Pir all right, evidently," observed the *chowkidar*, noting the man's wild eye, bird's-nest of hair, absurd whiskers, dribbling mouth and grotesque clothing.

From his fantastic lop-sided turban to his gondola *chapolis*, painted red and adorned with tufts of feathers, he was fantastically arrayed, his chief garment a cross between a short-sleeved night-shirt or a dressing-gown and a djibba or a poncho, which had evidently begun life as a quilted *rezai*, bed-cover, or eiderdown—lacking the eiderdown. A couple of cross-belts, worn bandolier fashion, the one yellow and the other red, were evidently ancient flags; while about his middle were several yards of rope forming a sash, from the back of which depended the tail of a horse.

Beneath his right arm were the disintegrating remains of a *serenai* or Pathan bag-pipes which lacked nothing but the chanter, one of the drones, and a few dependable patches to make it a musical or unmusical instrument.

Beneath his other arm, was a foolish-looking wand or sceptre, adorned with dirty ribbon, tinsel and copper wire, the handle of which was nevertheless a remarkably stout staff.

Obviously a genuine Holy Man.

As the door closed behind him, the Pir raised his hand, invoked the name of Allah and of Mahommed his Prophet, and called down a blessing upon his hearers,

"Announce to the Khan that the Pir Saleh-ud-din Ali Moussa honours him with a visit," he said.

According to custom, the itinerant Holy Man was made welcome, fed full and bidden to rest and refresh himself. This he would doubtless do for the usual

three days and then go upon his way in peace, having called down the blessings of Allah upon his hosts.

On being brought into the presence of the Khan and the men of his household, his brothers, half-brothers, brothers-in-law, cousins, sons, sons-in-law, adopted sons, nephews and the rest—just relatives unspecified, kinsmen, clansmen and fellow-tribesmen—the Pir was not received with any particular enthusiasm, inasmuch as, though he might be a genuine Pir of the very holiest and a man of great influence with the Prophet, he might also be nothing of the sort, a fraud, a wandering rascal who subscribed unhesitatingly to the doctrine "To walk is better than to work," and whose private slogan was "Dig I will not, and to beg I am unashamed."

Well the Khan knew that, while always showing reasonable hospitality to any wayfarer, one had to be a little careful. One would hate to be churlish to a Saint, but had no desire to be gushing to a sinner who pretended to be one. On the whole, perhaps it was better to over-do than to under-do the hospitality, as much more harm might accrue from offending a genuine Saint than over-pleasing a genuine sinner. For, while the blessing of the latter would do one no good, the curse of the former might do one infinite harm, not only here but hereafter.

And there again, one had to take a risk, for it was a by-no-means unknown thing for the cunning scout of an outlaw band to come to such a fort as the Khan's in the guise of a Pir and spy out the land, observe the strength or weakness of the garrison, take note of the number and condition of the rifles, see whether there was anything in the nature of a cannon or wall-gun,

note whether the water supply lay inside or outside the fort, make a mental map of the defences, and generally perform invaluable work for the brigands who intended to make a raid.

Once or twice such a spy in the guise of a Holy Man had been recognized for what he was, and had died a most unpleasant death, *pour encourager les autres* of the bandits of the mountains.

And between the two extremes, the genuine saintly Pir and the robber spy, were numerous gradations of rogue, from the man who knew something of the Koran and had been a bit of a Mullah in his day, to the mere tramp, ignorant, lazy and worthless, who wore the weird and wonderful garb of a border fakir, as a means of getting free food, shelter and alms for the asking, not to mention absolute immunity from molestation by outlaws, brigands and robbers.

The fact that such professional fakirs had nothing to fear from robbers, speaks not so much for the religious scruples of the latter as for their knowledge that no Holy Man is worth robbing.

The old Khan took stock of the *soi-disant* Pir Saleh-uddin Ali Moussa as he was brought into the hall where the men-folk sprawled about, relaxed, leaning against the great bolster-like cushions, tightly stuffed in their more or less white covers, that lay along the four sides of the room where the walls joined the floor; or squatting upon rugs about the Khan who occupied a small dais-like bed in the centre of the long wall opposite the door.

"*Salaam-un-alaik*. Peace be upon this house," greeted the Pir.

"*Alaik-us-salaam*. Peace be upon you," replied the Khan.

"May you be strong," wished the Pir.

"May you never be tired," hoped the Khan.

"May you have many sons," blessed the Pir.

"May you never be poor," prayed the Khan.

"Be seated," he added. "Have you been well fed?"

"Well indeed," answered the Pir, and hiccupped loudly in support of his statement and in proof of his meal.

"Whence come you, Holy One?"

"From the North," replied the Pir non-committally.

"Ah . . . And whither go you?" enquired the Khan.

"To the South," replied the Pir.

"Ah . . . And what is the news?" asked the Khan politely.

"Foolish men in Kabul plot against the life of the Amir and say that when he dies, the Border Tribes should take advantage of his death."

"How?"

"By raiding into Hindustan."

There was a stirring among the young men, many of whom literally sat up that they might take notice of the words of the Pir.

"Why?"

"Because the English cannot call upon Kabul to rebuke the Tribesmen and bid them keep the peace, lest the Amir fall upon them in the rear with an army."

"And is this good counsel?" asked the Khan blandly.

"It is bad counsel. None could be worse," replied the Pir.

"And why?"

“ Because if this Amir is gathered to his fathers, a stronger than he will take his place. The plotters are fools. They say ‘ *Let us slay him that his brother, who is our puppet, may take his place* ’. But his brother will not take his place. Or but for a brief space. A strong man, who already watches, will send the brother to join his brother, and the plotters will die a death that will make them wish they had not been born. And the Tribe that breaks the peace of the Border will find itself between the upper and the nether millstones—that strong man’s army and the army of the *Farungis*. ”

“ For a Holy Man, you interest yourself much in such matters ? ” observed the Khan.

“ Like many Mullahs, ” agreed the Pir. “ But unlike many Mullahs, I preach not war. I preach not that great folly whereby our young men are slain in battle, our villages burnt in punishment, our forts and watch-towers blown up in revenge, our rifles confiscated in thousands, our rupees demanded in reparation, our valleys invaded in scores by military roads. The counsel that leads to these things is bad counsel. ”

“ By Allah, it is true, ” agreed the Khan, stroking his beard.

“ And have you come direct from Kabul ? ” enquired the ancient Abdul Karim, the Khan’s brother.

“ I come straight from No-where and go straight No-whither, ” was the reply. “ I wander as Allah wills, and as the Prophet, his Servant, upon whom be peace, directs my feet. ”

“ It does not happen that the Prophet, upon whom be peace, directed your feet hither from the village of Zargun Khel, perchance ? ” enquired the even more

ancient Islam Hamzulla, cousin and chief counsellor of the Khan, a wise and wily man.

"It does not," was the reply

"It is well," replied Islam Hamzulla; and broke the ensuing silence by observing dreamily:

"One there was, once, long ago, who came here professing to be a Saint, and was none other than the biggest *budmash* of the band of Multan the Robber, his emissary, scout and spy, a strong and sturdy rogue. Clever he was not, but brave he was.

"Yes, he came here and enjoyed the hospitality of the Khan Saheb of that time, my uncle, on whom be peace. I was but a young man then, and foolish. Foolish no doubt; but I trapped the rogue. I had my suspicions of him from the first, for I, a wanderer, knew that I had seen his face before. I knew his voice. And I thought that I had seen, somewhere else and on someone else, a silver talisman that he wore about his neck.

"And in the night I woke him, with a knife at his throat; told him that if he moved I would thrust; told him that I recognized him . . . and he knew that he was caught, for, all about him, lay our young men sleeping, and there was no escape.

"Then I told him that long I had yearned to be a robber, to take to the hills, to live in a cave, to lead a man's life, to be such a one as the great Usman the Outlaw, or Dadai the Brigand, head of a great band of warriors, and to make for myself name and fame as a Border robber, raider and outlaw.

"If I helped him to escape, got him safe out of the Fort, would he take me to his leader and ask him to let me join the band?

“ By the strong light of the full moon that fell upon his face, I could see the rascal thinking quickly as he glanced around him, thinking whether he should seize my wrist, wrest the knife from my hand, slay me and escape—and realizing that I had but to shout ; that the fact of his showing fight would prove that he was but a trapped rat, a robber, a spy, and no Holy Man. I knew he was wondering whether my words were true as my eyes stared into his, knew that he was wondering whether it were his only chance and that he must take it.

“ ‘ *But what is this ?* ’ he whispered in his fear. ‘ *I know naught of Multan the . . .* ’

“ ‘ *Who mentioned Multan ?* ’ I jeered, pricking his throat. And he knew that he had said too much.

“ And I shouted and the young men sprang from their *charpais* and seized him, and we took him before the Khan Saheb, roused from his sleep. And I denounced him as a spy of Multan the Robber, and the Khan Saheb bade his son bring the holy Koran from its place beneath the green velvet cover on the window-ledge.

“ And he said to the man :

“ ‘ *Swear upon the Koran, by the Ninety and Nine Sacred Names of Allah, and by the Beard of the Prophet, that you know nothing of Multan the Robber and that you are a holy Pir.* ’

“ And the man feared, of course, to swear upon the Koran ; for though life is dear, salvation is dearer.

“ ‘ *Then,* ’ said the Khan Saheb, ‘ *you are caught. You have come into my fort as a spy . . . If I give you your life, will you lead my warriors to the hiding-place of Multan the Robber, bringing us to his cave while he sleeps, that we may capture him ?* ’

“ ‘How can I?’ asked the man. ‘He keeps good watch.’

“ ‘Where is his hiding-place?’ asked the Khan Saheb.

“ ‘Two kos beyond the western end of the Kohat Pass and north of it. At the back of the hill called Kuh-i-band, looking towards the Lakka Peak.’

“ ‘And if I give you your life, will you lead us to within sight of it, that we, feigning to be a kafila of Powindah merchants, may decoy them down, to fall upon us?’

“ ‘I will try,’ replied the man. ‘But if Multan the Robber catches me . . .’

“ ‘Fear not. He will never catch you,’ replied the Khan Saheb, ‘for I have caught you.’

“And of that spy, pretending to be a Holy Man, a saintly Pir, he made an example,” concluded Islam Hamzullah.

“Serve him right. The Khan Saheb did well,” asserted the Pir Saleh-ud-din Ali Moussa roundly, as the murmur of applause died away.

“What did he do to him?” he added in a voice possibly less robust.

“Basted him,” giggled Islam Hamzullah.

“Yes? What with?”

“Gravy, of course,” was the reply. And the assembly laughed merrily.

“Yes, you see, Multan the Robber had raided Khairabad village while the Khan Saheb was himself away from Khairistan, raiding, and there were but a few fighting men in the place, the rest being aged grey-beards and the women-folk.

“And having burned down the gates and burst in, he made a slaughter—and worse.

“ And this man, this spy, had been with them and not backward in evil doing. So, as I have said, of him the Khan Saheb made an example, that when Multan the Robber and his band came to know of it, as assuredly they must, they would know what to expect. Also that the Khan Saheb was a man who knew how to take his right and proper vengeance upon such grave-defiling jackals.

“ So he gave his orders and next day the Holy Man spy, the Pir robber and murderer and torturer, was bidden to a mutton-feast. And the ‘feast’ being ready, he was brought forth from the hut in which he had been guarded all night, and he was seated upon the ground in the midst of the courtyard, his ankles being bound together and his wrists tied to his ankles.

“ And there he sat with his chin upon his knees, and the Khan Saheb bade them remove his *puggri* and his shirt.

“ And on either side of him a tripod of long and strong *lathis* was set up, and across them was laid a pole, the pole being some three or four feet above the head of the false Holy Man.

“ And when all was ready, and the great company of tribesmen had seated themselves around the spy, bidding him to be of good cheer and of good appetite, a large cooking-pot was borne forth by two men, and hung by its short chains above the head of the spy.

“ Yes. He was a brave man, though an evil dog, for he lifted up his voice, not in lamentation and prayers for mercy, but in curses upon the Khan Saheb, his sons, his relatives, his house and all his tribe.

“ And in the midst of it, the Khan Saheb gave a sign, and the cook gave a pull upon a cord fastened to

the chain on the opposite side of the cooking-pot. The great pot tipped over, spilling its contents—and a gallon of boiling fat poured down in a stream upon the head of the spy.

“And screaming he died.”

And to the mind of one of the hearers of Hamzullah's story, came memories of another time and another place—of an Opera House and well-remembered words and music.

“*Something with boiling oil in it.*”

“Well, he never spied again, the *budmash*,” observed the Pir Saleh-ud-din Ali Moussa, as he glanced at the man who had hummed a bar of the music of *The Mikado*.

“No,” agreed Islam Hamzullah, “nor any other of the gang. Not in this valley. 'Twas even better than blinding him, cutting off his ears and hands, and sending him back as one does when one sings the fur from a rat, chops off his tail and sends him home to tell the rest that air and water in these parts are not good.”

“Yes,” agreed the Pir, “much better. Much more striking. After all, a man is liable to have that done to him anywhere, isn't he? I mean to say, a robber expects blinding and maiming and that sort of thing; but the other was a real novelty, and the story of it must have made quite an impression on Multan and his band.”

“Quite. They never troubled us again, and never sent any more spies,” replied Islam Hamzullah.

“Unless, of course, you are one of them,” he added.

“I?” replied the Pir Saleh-ud-din Ali Moussa. “I? A spy? Do I look like one?”

“Yes,” replied Islam Hamzullah.

"Well now, do I behave like one?" smiled the Pîr, and rising from his cushion, strode across to where Islam Hamzullah sat upon the dais at the feet of the Khan.

"Look at that," he said, stretching forth his hand. "What do you see?"

"I see an empty hand," replied Islam Hamzullah.

Whereupon the Pîr closed his hand and opened it again. And upon its broad palm lay a shining rupee.

"*Wah, wah!*" marvelled the assembly.

"Take it," said the Holy Man, throwing it into Islam Hamzullah's lap. "And this one, too," he added, producing a second from that astonished ancient's left ear.

A silence fell upon the company as they stared wide-eyed and open-mouthed at the Holy Man.

"How often can you do that?" enquired Shere Khan, who had seen a certain amount of conjuring in his time, and was less impressionable than his untravelled kinsmen.

"Thrice," replied the Holy Man, dexterously producing a third rupee from the circumambient air, and tossing it to the speaker.

"A pity you cannot do it all day long, Pîr Saheb," observed the Khan.

"As a matter of fact, I could do it all day and all night," replied the Pîr Saheb, but I have better things to do, nobler matters of which to think, higher pursuits in which to engage my time and the powers with which Allah has been pleased to endow me."

The tribesmen were impressed.

Islam Hamzullah—albeit a little uncomfortable in view of the fact that here was obviously a Holy Man of parts and power, whom he had perhaps antagonised

with his sceptical demeanour—maintained a somewhat ambiguous if not hostile attitude.

“ Obviously, Pir Saheb,” he said, “ you are what you profess to be ; and auspicious is the day on which you have honoured us with your presence.”

The Holy Man acknowledged the compliment.

“ On the other hand, how inauspicious would be the day on which you left us,” smiled Islam Hamzullah. “ Could you not shed the light of your countenance upon us always, and enrich this valley with your shining presence permanently ? ”

Smiling, the Pir shook his head.

“ I am a wanderer,” he said. “ It is my kismet that I must travel from place to place, exhorting the faithful and providing them with the opportunity for obeying the Koranic law that bids them give alms . . . Save only when rest is necessary can my feet be still.”

“ And what of a long rest ? ” enquired Islam Hamzullah. “ The rest that is unbroken. Having travelled so far and for so long, what about eternal rest ? ”

The Holy Man eyed the speaker askance as, naïvely, the latter mused :

“ We have no *Ziarat*, no holy shrine, in this valley, Pir Saheb.”

“ No ? ”

“ No. And it is a matter for regret that we have here no place of pilgrimage ; no sacred tomb of a Holy Man ; no sanctuary inviolable by enemies, by thieves, yea, by the most shameless Allah-forgotten bandits—such as was Multan the Robber himself.”

Uneasy smiles wreathed the countenances of Islam Hamzullah’s hearers.

What a wag he was, and how daring. But really,

he was overdoing it a bit with this Holy Man who was so obviously the genuine article.

"You know what some of the Adam Khel did in similar circumstances?" continued Islam Hamzullah.

"What?"

"Why, they felt that it was a reproach unto them that they had no *Ziarat*, no holy shrine, in their valley; so what did they do but send a deputation to the famous Sayed Yacoub Ali Achmed, Pir of Landi—known as the Pearl of Wisdom, and famous for his piety, holiness and learning—bearing gifts, and begging that he would visit their valley, give them his blessing, lighten their darkness and instruct their ignorance and accept an annual endowment from their clan.

"And the Sayed, the Holy Pir of Landi, accepted the invitation, paid the Adam Khel a visit. And never returned home.

"No, he is there still—and a noble *Ziarat* marks his resting-place."

"He died there?" asked Pir Saleh-ud-din Ali Moussa.

"Yes, by request, the same night.

"And we, we of this valley, also have no *Ziarat*," he mused.

The Pir rose to his feet.

"That shall be remedied," he said. "I will return here when old age comes upon me. I will return, and lay my bones among you; and you shall build me a *Ziarat* worthy of myself and you, worthy of your pious generosity and of my holiness. I have spoken. I would sleep."

And on the morrow the Pir Saleh-ud-din Ali Moussa, having given his blessing to the good men of Khairabad,

went on his way rejoicing ; a devious way that eventually took him to a house in the bazaar of the native city of Peshawar, a house belonging to one Moussafa Shah, formerly Rissaldar of the Cavalry Regiment of the Corps of Guides.

Into this house the wayfarer entered as the Pir Saleh-ud-din Ali Moussa, the wandering fakir, and from it he emerged as Major "Ganesh" Hazelrigg of the Secret Service. Thence he made his unobtrusive way to the Military Cantonment of Peshawar and to a secluded and inconspicuous little bungalow therein, whose elusive and retiring occupant, a brilliant and invaluable Secret Service agent who, unknown, unhonoured and unsung by the many, was, under the name of Tommy Dodd, admired and treasured by the few, his official colleagues, for his great knowledge, ability, courage and accomplishments.

By him Major Ganesh Hazelrigg was received without any amazement.

But with undoubted amazement he and his other visitor received the information, imparted casually by Hazelrigg, as they sat side by side in long chairs and smoked their cheroots on the verandah, that, in a far-distant village, many marches beyond the Khyber, he had seen a ghost.

"Frightened you, I expect," murmured Tommy Dodd, knowing that nothing and no one on this earth had ever really succeeded in frightening Ganesh Hazelrigg.

"A ghost !" smiled Colonel Ormesby, head of the Secret Service, who was the other visitor to the elusive and retiring occupant of the secluded and inconspicuous little bungalow.

"Shouldn't have thought that was much in your line, Ganesh. What sort of a ghost?"

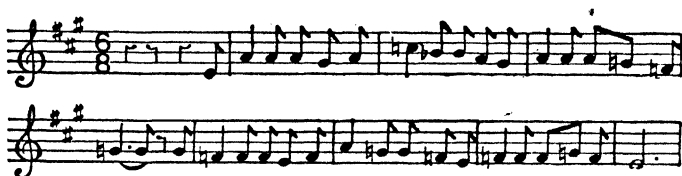
"Well," mused Major Ganesh Hazelrigg, "first of all, it was a Pathan. An absolutely complete, perfect and typical Pathan. Never was a Pathan looked so much like a Pathan as this Pathan did. And then it turned into a ghost. The ghost of a man I used to know. Yes. I used to know the man of that ghost—well."

"And how did the perfect Pathan turn into—a ghost?"

"By humming in plain English."

"How do you hum—in English?" enquired Colonel Ormesby.

And Ganesh Hazelrigg hummed:



"Oh, it hummed that, did it? It's from *The Mikado*, isn't it? Yes. Yes . . . Very queer indeed . . . But then I suppose a Pathan with a musical ear might conceivably remember a bar or two of English music? Remember it well enough to reproduce it accurately, too. But I shouldn't have thought it."

"And where would a Pathan hear *The Mikado*?" asked Hazelrigg.

"Oh, well, on a gramophone record in a Peshawar bawdy-house."

"They don't have 'em there," stated the occupant of the bungalow.

"How d'you know, Tommy?" enquired Colonel Ormesby.

"Well, damn it, I ought to. I spend enough weary hours in the Abodes of Joy in Peshawar, listening to bazaar-gossip . . . No, the music you get in those places is Indian stuff, ghastly native music—*sitar*, *sarangi*, *surmai* and *banshri* and tom-toms—and the horrible nasal chanting of the eternal *Zakhmi Dil*. The only Western tunes I've ever heard on a gramophone in a *dasi*-house are the sort of foul-disgrace-to-civilization noises that are called 'music-hall songs.'"

"*And her golden hair was hanging down her back*," murmured Ormesby.

"Yes, that sort of thing," agreed Tommy.

"Oh, but damn it all, Ganesh," said Ormesby "supposing your Pathan had been a sepoy in the Indian Army—Guides; 40th Pathans; 127th or 129th Baluchis; 29th, or other, Punjabis, why shouldn't he have heard selections from *The Mikado* played by the band on Mess night? As a matter of fact, one of the most delightful things I ever remember seeing was a huge white-bearded Pathan band-master peering through enormous steel-rimmed spectacles at his music, while he conducted his band—which was actually playing Gounod's *Serenade* on the Yacht Club lawn at Bombay.

"No," he added, "I don't think that humming a stave from *The Mikado* is enough to make a man of a ghost. No. Your ghost stays a man."

"Yes," smiled Ganesh, "he is a *man* all right. But the man of a ghost, nevertheless. Do you know the words of those particular bars of music?"

"No—I'm not a Pathan," grinned Tommy Dodd.

"No? Well, I'll tell you what the words are," replied Hazelrigg. "They're :

" 'It is my very humane endeavour
To make, to some extent,
Each evil liver a running river
Of harmless merriment.' "

"What about it?" enquired Colonel Ormesby.

"This about it, Sir. The whole company was laughing merrily at the idea of a feller being put to death, on that very spot, by having boiling oil poured over him. See? . . . And evidently the man of this ghost was reminded of *The Mikado*. He had sat many a time and oft in the stalls of *The Savoy* with his girl—or somebody else's—beside him and . . ."

"No, it won't do, Ganesh," interrupted Colonel Ormesby. "I admit it was queer. Not queer that a Pathan should be able to hum or whistle a bar or two of *The Mikado*, but that he should have made it quite so *à propos*."

"Yes, funny, wasn't it?" said Ganesh. "Quite strange. Because even if he knew English, you'd hardly expect him to know the words as well as the music of *The Mikado*, would you?"

"No, I wouldn't. But I'd still write it off as a coincidence. A really amazing coincidence, I admit. But the longer one lives and the more one sees, the less one is surprised at the truly astounding coincidences that do happen."

"Yes," yawned Ganesh. "That's a fact. It is also a fact that the ghost gave a little laugh that wasn't a Pushtu laugh at all. It was an English one."

"Oh, come, come, Ganesh."

"Well, Sir, I agree with Ganesh," put in the elusive

and retiring occupant of the bungalow known to his few friends as Tommy Dodd. "It's one of the things you've got to learn when you 'go native.' You've not only got to talk the vernacular more vernacularly than the vernacularist, so to speak, but you've got to laugh in the vernacular—and cough and sneeze and hiccup in the vernacular, too."

"Yes, it *is* so," affirmed Hazelrigg. "And this chap laughed in English—just as he had hummed in English."

"Well, far be it from me to contradict you, Ganesh, when you are on your native heath," propitiated Colonel Ormesby. "Still, I wouldn't be absolutely sure that a 'typical Pathan' wasn't a Pathan because he laughed in English or hummed in English."

"Perhaps not, Sir. But just when I was being clever, and putting two and two together and making five; putting the coincidence of the applicable humming together with the English chuckle; the fellow went and made it all a waste of time by . . ."

"Scratching himself in Pushtu?" enquired Colonel Ormesby.

"No. Murmuring under his breath: '*Something with boiling oil in it*,' in English."

"O-h-h-h! . . . O-h-h-h! . . . I see. I see. And I beg your pardon, Ganesh. Why the devil couldn't you have said so at once."

"Well, can't say everything at once."

"And that's when the Pathan turned into a ghost, eh?"

"Yes. A ghost that has been seen before, too."

"Seen before? By whom?"

"Thorburn of Napier's Horse. He saw him down

on the Mekran Coast near Godoz, with a bunch of gun-runners."

"How do you know it was the same man? Or ghost?"

"Because I happened to be in the Napier's Horse Mess when Thorburn came back and was telling them about it. He said he had seen a ghost and that the man of that ghost was—*Captain Richard Wendover*, late of Napier's Horse."

Tommy Dodd emitted a long low whistle, and then shook his head.

"But no, Wendover's *dead*," he said. "Killed in Africa. Body found by Major Robinson."

"By Gad!" exclaimed Colonel Ormesby suddenly. "That's it, is it? That explains a lot, whether the man is Wendover or not. Ever seen Wendover's handwriting?"

"Yes. Rather. Why?"

"Because I'm willing to make a small bet, or a big one, that your 'ghost' is the man who has, from time to time, sent me all sorts of priceless information from all sorts of places. I knew it was an Englishman, from the handwriting and the English . . . That's it. It's your ghost—whether it's Wendover or not. Must be. Yes. He must have made his way up from Godoz across Mekran and Persia to Afghanistan and Turkistan; through Bampur, Duzdab, Nasirabad, Herat, Penjdeh, Maimana, Hissar and Bokhara to Khojend, Tashkent and Khoqand; and down through Tashkurgan to Kabul, and thence to Gazni and Jellalabad. Because I got letters from the same chap from all those places and a lot of others; same handwriting and signature—John Smith. I sat up

and took notice from the very first one I got—that was from Duzciab—because the writer was obviously an Englishman, a soldier, an acute and accurate observer, and very much behind the scenes—I mean, in a position to know exactly what was going on, to see beneath the surface, and to put an accurate construction on what he saw and heard.

“His information, too, has proved so consistently correct that I have come simply to accept it as gospel, and to act on it even before checking-up. And when I do check-up and find that his statements don't tally with those of my own man I am pretty sure that my own man is wrong.”

“And so it proves, eh?” asked Tommy Dodd.

“Always. When I get notice from ‘John Smith’ that something is going to happen, it does happen. And when I receive information that something has happened, it has happened.

“By Jove, Ganesh,” he added, “this is interesting. Are you quite sure that the man—of your ghost—was Wendover?”

“Quite sure,” replied Ganesh Hazelrigg.

“But Wendover's dead, I tell you,” repeated Tommy Dodd plaintively.

“Then I've seen his ghost, Tommy,” replied Hazelrigg.

“You recognized him?” asked Colonel Ormesby.

“No, I won't say that. He's gone so marvellously Pathan, with the Mussulman-clipped moustache and beard; Pathan side-curls; hair bobbed at the back; and burnt-brown face and hands, that I shouldn't have recognized him. I shouldn't have dreamed, for a moment, that he was anything but what he looked,

a typical Tribesman. He's got the face and physique, you know. Fortune favoured the poor devil, for once, there. Just the sallow complexion, the eyes and eyebrows; just the frame and physique.

"No, I couldn't have picked him out of that couple of score of Pathans if I had been told that he was among them. No, and if he walked in here, now, with any Pathan *budmash* he picked up in the Suddar Bazaar in Peshawar, you wouldn't know which of the two was the Englishman. Nor should I, if I hadn't just encountered him. If I had met him alone on a hill-path, I shouldn't have given him a second glance. Why, bless my soul, I believe I could have engaged him here in Peshawar as a body-servant, a *chowkidar* or a syce, and had him for years without ever spotting him."

"No, of course he must be perfect, to have got away with it as he has," mused Colonel Ormesby. "Absolutely perfect. And he must have been in some tight corners and had some narrow squeaks. I wonder how on earth he managed to start it all. How he got in with them."

"Yes, and with the gun-runners among whom Thorburn saw him."

"Thought he saw him . . . There's one thing, Colonel," smiled Tommy Dodd, "if he's right, the clever old Ganesh has scored once again. He has spotted this chap—Wendover or not—without being spotted himself."

"Trust Ganesh," agreed Colonel Ormesby. "Wise old elephant on two legs."

"No, no," protested Hazelrigg. "I told you he took me in completely, and I should never have

spotted him at all if he hadn't been so carried away—by the marvellously dramatic story-telling of the old bird who was spinning the yarn about the boiling mutton-fat—that he went all English for a moment, forgot where he was, and remembered his *Mikado*."

"Well, there's where you're the better man," observed Tommy Dodd. "You'd never have done that, in like circumstances."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Major Hazelrigg modestly. "I've been longer at the game than he has. One's bound to make a slip sometimes. Bound to forget for a moment, sooner or later, and lower one's guard. What's the betting that if you were sitting one night in a corner of a Bokhara caravanserai with your tummy full of mutton-stew or *pilau*, just gooping at the stars and thinking of Piccadilly or Ascot or the nicest girl you ever knew, and the lad squatting next to you in a lamb's-skin bowler hat and a poshteen coat, suddenly said '*Got a match?*'—what's the betting your hand wouldn't go to your pocket? Or if he just suddenly said '*By Gum, look up at the balcony!*' what's the betting that you wouldn't glance up at the balcony?"

"Yes, you might. Though I doubt it in your case, Ganesh. But that's different. A sudden surprise-attack like that. What I meant was that you'd never burst into song, so to speak."

"You'd think so, wouldn't you? And yet, do you know that, one particularly glorious morning, going down the Tunjind Pass, I suddenly found myself whistling at the top of my—er—whistle. In English, too. It was *John Peel*, and the connection was a marvellous lad in pink, with a pack of hounds."

"What?" jeered Tommy Dodd. "Riding to a meet. On a horse? In hunting pink with a pack of fox-hounds?"

"No," replied Ganesh. "Riding to Thibet. On a yak. In quilted pink satin. With a pack of curs."

"And before you knew it, you were whistling *John Peel*, eh?"

"I was."

"Still, you were alone and didn't give yourself away, whereas Wendover, if it were he, was in the middle of a regular *mejlis* of Tribesmen."

"Yes, but he didn't give himself away by humming an air and murmuring under his breath."

"But he did. To you."

"Yes, but I mean, he didn't—to them. No, I hand it to him. He's wonderful. And if he did hum and murmur in English, the others never noticed anything."

"I wonder if it is Wendover," mused Tommy Dodd. "I heard the most definite and detailed account of his having been killed in Africa."

"From the man who saw his corpse, I suppose?" enquired Ganesh Hazelrigg sarcastically.

"No, but from a man who knew Major Robinson, the chap who built the Tabundi railway; and this man told me that Robinson assured him that Wendover was dead. He knew it for a fact. Had proof of it."

"I'm sure he did. Absolute proof," smiled Hazelrigg. "He's alive again, nevertheless."

"Oh, yes, I remember the details now," replied Tommy Dodd. "Robinson saw his shirt, all torn and gory. He had been eaten by lions."

"May have been in a lions' den—like Daniel," said Hazelrigg.

"But he came out again," he added. "I tell you, Wendover is alive, and at the present moment he's in the Khan of Khairastan's country, and in his Khairabad Fort, or was, when I passed through. I saw him and recognized him, just as Thorburn did at Godoz."

"Perhaps you saw the same man whom Thorburn saw at Godoz," suggested Colonel Ormesby. "A renegade Englishman—not Wendover—some chap who has gone native, turned Pathan, and who is nevertheless doing what he can for his country by sending valuable secrets to the Secret Service . . . There's really no reason to suppose it is Wendover—since you admit you didn't recognize him as Wendover."

"No, I didn't exactly say that, Colonel," replied Hazelrigg. "I said I should never have recognized him, or imagined for one moment that he was other than a Pathan, if he hadn't drawn my attention to himself by humming, and then murmuring a sentence, in English. But when I realized that the man must be an Englishman, I immediately remembered Thorburn's encounter with Wendover, and looked again. Considered him as a Wendover proposition, so to speak."

"And it was Wendover," he added impressively.

"Don't think me—er—over-sceptical and contumacious," said Colonel Ormesby. "I don't want to be irritating, but I do want to get to the bottom of this, and be absolutely certain. So I want to raise all the objections I can, and hear you dispose of them. I'm perfectly convinced, of course, that you stumbled on a disguised Englishman—who is most certainly not one of my men, for I know exactly where they all are, and I've got nobody within hundreds of miles of the Khairastan khanate—and I absolutely accept every-

thing except the man's identity. Now, isn't it possible that you and Thorburn saw the same man; and, inasmuch as he has the physique and make-up to play Pathan, and you admit that Wendover had the physique and make-up to play Pathan, this man must, to some slight extent, resemble Wendover. Now, may not both you and Thorburn have jumped to the wrong conclusion—that this fellow is Wendover?"

"No," replied Ganesh Hazelrigg. "No. Impossible."

"Why?"

"Because Thorburn spoke to him, and he answered in English. Thorburn told him that he knew his name and the fellow said, still in English:

"*'Yes, I know my name, too, and it is Gul Mahommed.'* And then Thorburn asked him if there was anything he could do for him, and the man answered, *'Yes, there is. You can clear out of here.'* Then Thorburn, shrugging his shoulders and saying in effect, *'Oh, well, if that's your line, stick to it,'* nevertheless had a quiet dig at him. He said, *'You want me to "wend over" the mountains, eh?'* And the Englishman laughed at Thorburn's little pun, and nodded."

"Thorburn himself told you all this, I suppose?" asked Colonel Ormesby.

"Yes. Well; in point of fact, he actually told it to his Colonel and the Second-in-Command in my presence, and we all questioned him. Thorburn knew it was Wendover; and he absolutely convinced me that, without a shadow of a doubt the man was Wendover. And mind you, he and Thorburn had been brother officers in Napier's Horse for years."

"And besides," added Hazelrigg, "I myself knew

it was Wendover there in Khairabad of Khairistan. I realized it the moment I knew that he was an Englishman and remembered that Thorburn had seen Wendover in Pathan kit . . . No, I'm as sure of it as I ever was of anything in this world; and you can take it from me, Colonel, that Captain Richard Wendover, late of Napier's Horse, is, or very recently was, living as a Pathan in Khairabad."

"Well then, why the devil didn't you speak to him?" enquired Tommy Dodd.

"Because it was more than my life was worth. And possibly his, too. I was doing my Holy Man stuff, and they were a bit sceptical as to my *bona fides*. They had been had like that before. The Holy Man business is getting a bit overcrowded, and every *bud-mash* who wants to live on the country sticks straws in his hair, puts on a patchwork quilt, plays the goat, and says he's a Number One Pir . . . You can bet that if I had had the ghost of a chance of a quiet word with Wendover, I'd have taken it. I couldn't bat an eyelid in his direction in the hall there, with the Khan's chief counsellor more than hinting that it wouldn't be half a bad tip to give me a job as leading man in a funeral act—bury me as a perfectly good Pir and take a chance on whether I turned up trumps as a draw for the faithful, the miracle-seeking pilgrims. In fact, he remarked that they had not got a place of pilgrimage in the whole khanate, and could do with one as a source of revenue.

"No, my own skin was my first preoccupation, and of course I didn't know whether Wendover was in the same boat, pretending to be a genuine Pathan; and I didn't want to involve him in my fall from grace, into the tomb, if they decided that I would be more

useful dead than alive. And I hoped to get a chance of a word with him next day. But I didn't. I got a very straight tip instead, from a chap who I think must have been in the Indian Army, that it wouldn't be a bad idea for me to go while the going was good.

"His line was that if I were a genuine Holy Man he would acquire merit by saving my life; but that there was a party who took the view that if I wandered on I certainly should be of no further use to them, whereas if I remained under a nice white shrine I might be a lot of good, if they could spread a yarn that I had come to Khairabad on purpose to work a miracle, and had then died.

"In point of fact I had worked a few miracles, too," he added, "to prove my genuineness."

"I see," smiled Colonel Ormesby. "Over-did it, eh? Too good a chance for them to lose."

"Yes. I decided that Khairabad was a splendid place to get out of; and though I hung on as long as I dared, I didn't get another glimpse of Wendover."

"Pity. Do you think he had the slightest suspicion of you?" asked Colonel Ormesby.

"No, I don't. He had no reason to. Mind you, it never occurred to anybody, for one moment, that I wasn't a Tribesman. The only doubt was as to whether I was a genuine honest-to-Allah Pir, who was worthy of reverence—and martyrdom."

"So you put your valuable life before your very natural curiosity, and came away without settling the question," observed Colonel Ormesby.

"I came away without communicating with Wendover," was the reply. "But there is no 'question'

about it, Sir. You really can take it as an indisputable fact."

"H'm," mused Colonel Ormesby, a man cautious by nature and by training. "If so, I wonder how one could get in touch with him. You didn't hear what he called himself now, of course?"

"No. Nobody addressed him by name in my presence; and naturally I wasn't going to draw attention to him by asking him his name, or enquiring from anybody else."

"And if I sent a letter addressed to *John Smith, Esq., care of the Khan of Khairastan, Khairabad*, Wendover—if it be he—would never get it, of course. Even if it reached Khairabad."

"No. Not without his giving himself away as a European, assuming that the letter reached the Khan, and Wendover was aware of the fact."

"What about going that way, Ganesh, next time you go to Afghanistan and Turkistan?"

"Yes, I could do that if you like, Sir, of course. A bit out of the way—and a bit risky. They may decide next time that they will have a *ziarat* and that my sainted bones shall occupy it."

"Yes, you run enough risks in the ordinary way of business without going where you are 'wanted.'"

"Still, I could go in a different rôle, of course," observed Hazelrigg. "I could be a Powindah merchant beating up a bit of trade—rifles and ammunition or piece-goods . . . But then, of course, Wendover may not be there a few months hence."

"No."

"What made you go there, in the first place?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, I was skirting round the Lakhi Khel country, avoiding old One-eared Suleiman and his merry men; and also I had heard that the Khan of Khairastan was said to be going to join the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot with the Abazai and the Basar Afridis at a conference on the Afghan border near Giltraza, and I wanted to see whether his young men were rampaging. There's the usual sort of silly gup about their having a shot at Giltraza Fort one fine day, and lifting the rifles and ammunition—the arms-traffic being in such a bad way now that the Gulf is practically closed.

"I've shoved all that in the Report, Colonel," he added.

"Well," mused Colonel Ormesby, "whether this chap is Wendover or not, I'd certainly give something to get in touch with him, get hold of him, and use him regularly. You see, it would double his value if I could give him instructions, and send him wherever I wanted him to go, instead of just being thankful for receiving whatever information he chooses to send me. Think what it would mean if I could plant a man like that permanently at . . .

"By the way," he interrupted himself. "What exactly is the Wendover story, and how long ago was it—if the man is Wendover . . ."

Ganesh Hazelrigg laughed curtly.

"He's Wendover, all right, Sir. I know it, and you can safely accept it. I wouldn't tell you so, otherwise."

"No, no, Ganesh. I'm sure you wouldn't, but . . ."

"He was cashiered for being drunk on duty, in time of war. Blind drunk, when commanding an extremely important post that was actually besieged. The relieving force found him dead drunk, and the place

commanded by an I.M.S. Lieutenant. There's no possible shadow of doubt, on the evidence. And the most damning of that was given by the Colonel who commanded the relief force. He found him on his bed with a couple of empty whisky bottles, dead to the world, unwakeable. The doctor himself gave medical and other evidence that was unshakeable, unquestionable. There were also the Native Officers of the garrison, and sepoys—orderlies, messengers, sentries and so forth. Some people thought he was lucky merely to be dismissed with ignominy. Overwhelming evidence and not a shadow of doubt."

"No," said Tommy Dodd. "I was on Intelligence in Mombasa at the time. Not a possibility of doubt."

"None whatever," agreed Hazelrigg. "In my mind, at any rate. Not the faintest shadow of the suspicion of a doubt that Wendover was never drunk in his life. He took his peg like we do, and was just about as likely to get drunk."

"I *knew* him," he added.

"Yes, but did you ever see him under extreme stress and strain?" asked Colonel Ormesby. "I recollect the case now. I was in England at the time. As I remember it, there had been a long siege, and they were in a bad way—half-rations, malaria, dysentery and so on. Isn't it probable that Wendover, unable to eat pantile biscuits, india-rubber bully-beef and raw coconut, lived on whisky—until it became a necessity? And then increased the dose, both in frequency and strength, still as a necessity—until he collapsed?"

"No, it isn't," replied Ganesh Hazelrigg. "Not in the case of Richard Wendover. It wouldn't begin even to sound possible to anybody who really knew

him. Granted he was as ill as a man could be and keep on his feet—with no proper food and sleep, and proper dysentery and malaria instead: and granted he kept himself going with whisky. Nevertheless, he never drank too much, and I'll stake my life on it that he never went to bed with a couple of bottles of whisky, and drank himself drunk. He never even got the least bit drunk. He never even drank enough to make himself feel that he was beginning to get drunk. However ill and weak he was, he never touched whisky till evening."

"How do you know?"

"Because I know Wendover."

"H'm. He was your friend, and we know you'd always stick up for a friend, Ganesh, whatever . . ."

"I tell you, Sir, that, either I know nothing whatsoever about my fellow-man, that I am absolutely no judge of men at all, that I'm an ignorant, unobservant, gullible fool—or else Richard Wendover never in his life drank more whisky than he could carry without showing it in the slightest degree."

Tommy Dodd leant across and patted his friend upon the shoulder.

"Quite so, Ganesh. That's all right, old bird. But look here. Have you never been so weak and tired, so down and out, that when you took a whisky and soda you said, '*Damn it, that stuff has gone straight to my head*'? Why, a man can be in such a condition that his ordinary normal sundowner, his one and only of the day, that he takes every day of his life, knocks him clean off his perch, and makes him feel as though he had had half a dozen."

"Yes, yes, my good ass," replied Ganesh Hazelrigg.

"We know all about that. And I daresay that when Wendover took his evening bracer, he did say to himself, '*By Jove! that warms me up. That tickles my tummy. Blest if it isn't going to my head!*' Quite so. And the last thing he'd dream of doing would be to take another one, much less go to bed with a couple of bottles and a quart pot, and drink himself pretty nearly to death. Talk sense."

There was a brief silence while the three men pondered, considered.

"*Drunk!*" ejaculated Ganesh Hazelrigg. "Wendover blind drunk! I tell you he was never more drunk than we three are at this moment. I'd stake my soul on it that Wendover was found guilty of a crime that he never committed, was disgraced and cashiered and broken for something he never did. It was an abominable miscarriage of justice. A cruel tragedy. The most devilish and abominable . . ."

"Well then, how do you account for it, Ganesh?" Colonel Ormesby interrupted the elephantine rumblings of the man affectionately known to his friends as the Elephant God.

"I don't account for it," was the reply. "I can't. But I'm going to have a damned good shot at doing it, now that I know that Wendover really is alive, and has gone native. You see, when it happened I was in gaol . . ."

"Best place for you," murmured Tommy Dodd.

" . . . in Tashkent; and when I got out, I had to go on to Hunza, and by the time I got back to India it was too late to do anything. Wendover was dead. As you say, his mangled body had been found with the name-tab sewn on to his shirt. So I wrote Wend-

over off. And wrote his case down as one of the saddest and darkest and most mysterious tragedies I had ever come across—which is saying something—intending some time to go into the matter. It was too late to do anything for Wendover, but I could satisfy myself, either that it was true, which I knew it wasn't, or that it was untrue, in which case I might be able to do something to . . . to . . . prove it; to clear up the mystery; and to rehabilitate the poor chap's memory. Posthumous vindication, anyhow."

"Yes," agreed Colonel Ormesby. "I can understand your wanting to try."

"And then, on my way from the Gulf, by Karachi and Quetta, to Peshawar and Afghanistan, I stayed a night with Napier's Horse, as I say, and heard Thorburn's tale of having seen Wendover's ghost at Godoz in Mekran. And though he didn't say that the disguised Englishman admitted that he was Wendover, I was quite convinced that it was he, alive and well, and that Thorburn had seen him. And now I have seen him, and I know that Thorburn was right.

"And I'm going to do something about it," he added.

"But what can anyone do, after all this time?" asked Colonel Ormesby. "And what can anyone do in the face of the findings of a Court-Martial? It's not as though it were a hole-and-corner affair, either; hurriedly held under a tree; with doubtful witnesses; *shenzis*, who say what they think you want them to say, and in a language that you don't understand. The trial was completely regular, very thorough, and the evidence overwhelming."

"Yes, as good a case of 'trial by one's peers' as

you could have," agreed Tommy Dodd. "Not merely ~~one~~ judge, and he possibly prejudiced or biased, but ~~five~~ of them; and every one of the five only too anxious to be able to find him 'Not Guilty.'"

"And what's more, don't forget, my good chap," added Colonel Ormesby, "that there was not only unbiased and intelligent evidence, but actually expert evidence. There was a doctor there, remember."

"Yes, I remember the doctor all right," growled Ganesh Hazelrigg.

"And he had Wendover under observation, too," said Colonel Ormesby.

"Yes; and Wendover had had him under observation," was the stubborn and apparently pointless reply.

"What d'you mean?" asked Colonel Ormesby. "We all know that there is no exact definition of drunkenness, and that different people hold different opinions as to whether a man is drunk or not. When a man is run in, accused of being drunk in charge of a motor-car, the Station Sergeant says he is drunk because he can't stand against a wall with his eyes shut, or walk along a chalk line, or spell Nebuchadnezzar backwards. And the accused and his friends say that of course he wasn't drunk and that he had only had a small one, three days ago; and his excited manner was due to the rude way in which the policeman spoke to him. Then they call in a doctor, and his evidence is generally considered conclusive, one way or the other. . . . Well, here it wasn't a case of calling in a doctor to have a look at Wendover and give an opinion on his condition. The doctor had been living with him for months and knew exactly what Wendover was doing,

all the time. He gave evidence, both as a colleague who had actually seen him drinking hard, and as a doctor who had seen him helplessly and hopelessly drunk."

"'Fraid it's no good, Ganesh," Tommy Dodd agreed with Colonel Ormesby. "When you come to consider the evidence of the man who found him and the man who had lived with him. I happen to know Colonel Maldon—one of the best. An awfully good sort. He never made trouble for anybody yet, and he'd have saved Wendover if it had been humanly possible. But he had to testify that he found him blind drunk. It isn't as though there were no European witnesses. And when one of them is actually a doctor . . ."

"Did you ever meet that doctor, Tommy?" asked Ganesh.

"No."

"Well, he's not a European, except in name. Breckinge. He's as black as your boot. A Eurasian. And of a very bad type. Native Goanese blood on one side, and sweeper on the other. I do know him. Know something about him, too. And I wouldn't convict a dog on his evidence. As it happens, I stayed with Wendover down in Madrutta before he went to Africa. I was there looking for that seditionist, Ranjit Singh, who had just landed from America and who was meeting Sant Arjun Rama and Luxman Dhonde and the rest of that gang. And, poking about in the bazaar, as a one-eyed leper, I noticed Master Breckinge, whom I had seen at the Gymkana, go into a funny-place. And a night or two afterwards, poking around as a Gulf pearl-merchant, I found him in the funny-place, had a talk with him, and learned some very interesting

things. Not only from him, but about him, from a Heart's Delight who occasionally turns an honest penny, on the side, by selling 'information received' to the C.I.D. or the Secret Service. A very knowledgeable wench and a most useful young woman."

"Yes, when I heard about Wendover's case and the details of the Court-Martial, I remembered the good Breckinge," he added.

"Led a double life in Madrutta, did he?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"Yes. Quadruple one, too. He had some queer hobbies and diversions. Very much of a blackguard. And it is on him I fix my hopes."

"What of?" asked Colonel Ormesby.

"Learning the truth about Wendover."

"Don't you think he told the truth about Wendover at the Court-Martial? The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"I think he told the truth and nothing but the truth. But I am perfectly certain he didn't tell the whole truth," was the reply.

"And what about Colonel Maldon?" asked Colonel Ormesby.

"He, of course, told the truth," admitted Ganesh, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—as he saw it."

"And as he saw Wendover," observed Tommy Dodd. "Dead drunk."

"No one ever saw him drunk any more than they ever saw him dead," replied Hazelrigg stubbornly. "And I'm going to prove it. If I were free, I'd set about it now. Anyhow, I'll devote my next leave to it. Yes, I'll see Wendover if I can, on

my way North ; and speak to him, too, if it is possible. I'll go as an Afghan merchant with a red-dyed beard ; or as a horse-coper ; and try to chum up with him as though he were a Pathan and I had taken a fancy to him. Get him to go out for a ride with me, or guide me somewhere, and then give him the surprise of his life."

" Suppose he denies that he is Wendover ? "

" He won't, when I've talked to him," was the confident reply.

" And when I've learned all he can tell me," he continued, " I'll find Breckinge and give him a surprise, too."

" What will you do ? " asked Colonel Ormesby.

" Well, I haven't thought it out yet, but something on the lines of *All is discovered and your one chance is to make a clean breast of it* sort of idea."

Tommy Dodd laughed.

" You are an unscrupulous devil, Ganesh," he said.

" Regular Bad Man," agreed Colonel Ormesby.

" Or perhaps take a blackmailing line," smiled Ganesh, " if the *Fly immediately, for they are on your track* gambit doesn't work. Or perhaps put one of our Heart's Delights on to him, to make him drunk and get him boasting. He's the sort of chap who'd talk when he was in liquor, especially if a woman got him bragging of how he had done-down the wicked enemies who had triumphed over him."

" Was Wendover his enemy ? " asked Colonel Ormesby.

" Wendover was the sort of man who'd be bound to make an enemy of a subordinate of the Breckinge type. He'd be everything that Wendover hated, and

Wendover would be everything that Breckinge hated. Knowing them both, I'm perfectly certain that Wendover and Breckinge couldn't be shut up together in a besieged post without bad trouble. Wendover's attitude would be one of contemptuous dislike, and Breckinge's one of resentful hatred."

"Got it all cut and dried, old son, haven't you?" smiled Tommy Dodd.

"Yes, pretty well," asserted Ganesh. "Knowing the position and the men, I can see what happened . . . Look here, damn it all, Tommy, don't *you* know anybody who couldn't possibly, under any conceivable circumstances, go and get blind drunk when men's lives depended on him; when the defence of a very important fort depended on him; and possibly the success of a whole campaign. Don't you?"

"Well, yes, of course I do," admitted Tommy Dodd.

"And don't you, Colonel?"

"Yes, certainly," admitted Colonel Ormesby. "In point of fact, I think I could begin with myself," he smiled.

"Of course you could, Sir."

"Well, believe me," continued Hazelrigg, "Richard Wendover could no more do that than you could do it yourself. Can you imagine such people as, say, General Gordon doing it during the last days of Khartoum. Could you imagine Lord Roberts having done it? Or Sir George White at Ladysmith? Or Baden-Powell at Mafeking? Can you imagine any of them being found blind drunk at their post, in the presence of the enemy? Of course not, and I could just as easily imagine Richard Wendover doing it."

The others smoked in silence for a while.

"Very well, then," Ganesh Hazelrigg broke out again. "There must be explanation for what happened—and that black-faced scoundrel of a doctor is the explanation."

"And what about Colonel Maldon and the native officers? What's the explanation of their evidence?"

"The said black-faced scoundrel of a doctor."

"Why?"

"Wendover wasn't drunk. He was drugged."

Major Hazelrigg's listeners literally sat up and took notice.

"My dear chap!" expostulated Colonel Ormesby.

"Mellow Drama. 'Gee-whiz!'" smiled Tommy Dodd.

"Wendover was drugged," repeated Hazelrigg doggedly.

"How can you say that? Why do you . . .?"

"Because there is no other explanation."

"Melodrama? Black tragedy rather!" exploded Colonel Ormesby. "And poisonous unspeakable villainy. By God, if that were true . . ."

"It is true," asserted Hazelrigg again. "It is true because it must be. Because it is the only possible explanation. Accept the premisses, and it's the only conclusion. Ask yourselves. Accept my word for it that Wendover could not and did not do such a thing, and yet was found apparently dead drunk, what's the obvious and only explanation? That he was drugged. Given that he was shut up, for months on end, with the sort of man who'd jar upon him incessantly, who'd irritate him every time he opened his mouth, who'd offend him at every turn, who'd undoubtedly anger him by laziness and bad work—and what's the unavoid-

able result? Friction, trouble, bad feeling, mutual antipathy.

"Breckinge would deservedly get the rough side of Wendover's tongue; and when occasion required, that side of Wendover's tongue could be very rough. And what happens when that class of mongrel is told off? He takes it badly. Instead of thinking how he can improve, he thinks how he can 'get even.' And what would be the method and weapons that would appeal to that type of cur when it happens to be a doctor? Breckinge's one idea—and mind you, Breckinge would be in an abnormal state of mind, too, for conditions were almost as nerve-racking and debilitating for him as for Wendover—his one idea would be to get even. Well, Breckinge is a doctor.

"And Breckinge got even," added Major Hazelrigg, and never did that ponderous man speak more weightily.

Again a silence in the moonlit verandah.

"By Jove, Ganesh," said Colonel Ormesby at last, "what an appalling accusation. What a perfectly ghastly thing . . ."

"For Richard Wendover," interrupted Hazelrigg. Silence again.

"Well, my son," said Tommy Dodd at length, "you've said something."

"And I'm going to prove it," replied Hazelrigg.

PART III

CHAPTER I

INAYATULLAH HUSSEIN, the Afghan horse-coper, continuing his devious journey, which he had recently broken at Khairabad, rode along on his Kabuli stallion, with his new acquaintance, Gul Mahommed, the friend and retainer of Inayatullah's patron and customer Shere Khan, son of the Khan of Khairastan, chatting merrily of the only three important and interesting subjects of conversation, horses, war and love, the greatest of which in the opinion of Inayatullah Hussein was obviously horses.

Afar off, at a turn of the high mountain road, they beheld a flag-bedecked and deserted *ziarat*.

"We'll halt there and rest awhile," quoth Inayatullah, "for I have placed certain things therein for safety, a sanctuary which the wicked robber would not violate."

"Nay," added he caustically, "nor the holiest saint. Not even the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot, should he pass this way."

"Which is not likely!" exclaimed Gul Mahommed.

"No, it is not very probable, but one never knows. One never knows. I have heard of even more impossible things happening."

The men rode on in silence.

"Have you heard any talk of this same Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot?" enquired Inayatullah casually.

"There is some talk about him," replied Gul Mahommed.

"Yes, there seems to be talk about him everywhere. What are they saying in this part of the world?"

"Oh, I don't pay much attention," replied Gul Mahommed, "but the Khan and his counsellors were speaking of him the other day."

"He had sent a messenger, I suppose?"

"I believe so."

Gul Mahommed was obviously not interested in the sayings and doings of the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot, but apparently Inayatullah was.

"I am a gossip," he said. "Part of my business is to know the news. Helps the patter when I am selling the horses. Everybody is talking about the Singing Hadji. He's going to cause trouble again."

"Yes?" yawned Gul Mahommed.

"Yes. So men say. I thought he had been quiet for an unusually long time. I wonder if he wants your Khan to join in the trouble?"

"I wonder."

"They say there's going to be fighting. They say he's going to proclaim a *jehad*, and start by having a shot at Giltraza Fort."

"Well, it's all good for trade," he added. "Armies mean horses. I wonder if any of the Afghan cavalry regiments will be moving toward the Border?"

"Why should they?"

"True. One should not talk like that. A gossip has to be careful how he mentions the Amir. But I can talk freely to you, oh, Gul Mahommed, friend of my friend and friend of my heart."

Gul Mahommed turned an impassive face toward the garrulous man, and with raised eyebrows considered this effusiveness.

A very sudden friendship. What did the rogue want ?

What was the Pathan tag ? ‘ *Honest as an Afghan horse-coper* ’ ? Yes, and wasn’t there one to the effect that a fool trusts a snake, a wolf, a woman and—an Afghan ? The Pathan ought to know, for they could do a little in that way themselves.

“ Well, I shan’t report it to the Amir,” he said sarcastically.

“ No. Nor to anybody else. I was only wondering, because there is a talk of war, and war means horses, and horses are my living. Will the Khan move when the Singing Hadji gives the signal ? Or will he pay off old scores by taking the rascal in the rear when he attacks Giltraza ? ”

“ How should I know ? ”

“ By hearing the Khan’s words, as a man does hear the words of the father of his friend, with whom he lives as a brother.”

“ Well, I haven’t heard any words on the subject.”

“ Ah, you are not a leaking *mussuck*, Gul Mahommed. Now I did hear some words in Peshawar. Very interesting. The Sirkar wants to be able to march troops quickly to the Singing Hadji’s part of the world, should need arise again—as surely it will. And there was a talk about a Road coming up in this direction, and about an offer of a fine subsidy to the Khan of Khairastan if he would be the guardian of that Road, and guarantee it. Keep it open for everybody two days a week like the Levies do the

Khyber. They say in the bazaar that Sahibs are coming to Khairabad . . .”

“*What?*” ejaculated Gul Mahommed.

“ . . . to talk with the Khan of Khairastan, and to say that if he will make his *jowans* into a *pultan*, the Sirkar will give him a fine *pinson*, and give the *jowans* the same *puggarh* that they give the sepoy of the Indian Army, as well as issuing rifles, rations and ammunition to them. That’s fine *khubbar*, isn’t it?”

“Did you tell the Khan Saheb?”

“No. I had it on the tip of my tongue, and then I remembered the fate of a friend of mine, also a poor dealer in horses, who told some news to the Amir at Kabul.”

Inayatullah fingered his beard and laughed fatly.

“Yes. He must have been drinking *sherab*, or something of the sort. If he had been drinking of the Forbidden, what happened served him right, for in his loose-tongued loquaciousness he said to the Amir who was looking over the string of horses my friend had brought:

“‘Oh, King of Kings, I am from Penjdeh and there men say that the grey-coats are coming. The great Russian Bear is moving south, going to invade Afghanistan.’

“‘Is that so?’ said the Amir. And then: ‘Climb that tree, oh man, and keep watch against their coming.’

“Well, it does not do to delay when the Amir gives an order. So, to humour the merry Amir, my friend climbed the tree that stood near-by, in the Palace grounds. And then the Amir turned to an officer and said:

“‘Station sentries beneath that tree with loaded

rifles, relieving them every two hours, by night and day; and when our watchman descendeth, or perchance falleth, from that tree, they will shoot him in the stomach. On thy head be it.'

"So there he stayed until he fell from the tree. And the Amir inherited the horses.

"No," concluded Inayatullah, "it is not always wise to bring news to people in whose power you are. If the news is stale they think you are a fool and bid you depart while the gate is yet open; and if the news is unpleasant, they may forbid you to depart, even though the gate be open. But you, being the friend of his beloved son, could well give him the news about the coming of the Road."

"Is it true?"

"Allah knows! But how often is bazaar gossip wrong? I have never found it to err, save in small detail. Undoubtedly the Sirkar is going to make a Road that would pass through the Khan's country of Khairastan, and as the Khan Saheb is the biggest chief for fifty *kos*, it is certain they will offer to subsidize him as its guardian. Either that or make war upon him the first time his young men come down upon the working-parties and destroy them, or waiting until the Road is made, come down and plunder the *kafilas*, or collect heavy toll from them."

"I will tell him what you say, Inayatullah," said Gul Mahommed.

"It will interest him," observed Inayatullah. "You know the Sirkar is wise as well as strong. And just too. Very just. Understanding that a man must live, and that the Khan and his ancestors have lived for many centuries by guaranteeing the safety of the

caravans—at a price—the Sirkar realizes that if it takes away his means of livelihood, it must compensate him. Rather would it pay him the equivalent and keep him as a friend, than beggar him and turn him into an enemy, an outlaw and raider, who will not only exact yet heavier toll than before, but will be as a thorn in the side, attacking their Forts, cutting off their convoys, yea, even raiding into Peshawar itself. . . . Here's the *ziarat*. Let's off-saddle and rest the horses awhile, as we eat and drink."

And dismounting, the two men loosened their saddle-girths, raised and lowered the saddles a few times, removed the bits from the horses' mouths, and dropped the reins over their heads.

Unfolding and spreading upon the ground a saddle-cloth, Inayatullah lowered his heavy frame to it, sighed luxuriously, crossed his legs and fumbled in a big bag slung beneath his *poshteen*.

"Will you break bread with me and share a cold *chupatti* and mutton?" said Inayatullah hospitably, as Gul Mahommed seated himself beside him.

"No, I thank you. I will return to the fort of my friend Shere Khan from here, and a meal will be awaiting me."

"Ah," smiled Inayatullah, smacking his lips. "Lovely Patna rice, each grain bigger and softer than the last. With saffron. And curry of the tail of the fat-tailed sheep. Allah! Or a *pilau* of chicken-livers, rice, raisins, pistachio nuts, shredded onion, cloves, chopped fruit. A mountain of it, rising from a lake of *ghee*. Ah-h-h-h . . ."

"What is there better?" agreed Gul Mahommed somewhat unenthusiastically.

"Why, my son," replied Inayatullah, in English, laying his hand upon Gul Mahommed's knee, "a lobster-claw and a glass of Veuve Cliquot, at Ascot, say—or . . ."

It speaks well for Gul Mahommed's nerves and self-control that he did not start or exclaim.

"What did you say?" he asked apathetically, in Pushtu.

"I said, don't be an ass, Wendover. Come off it. I'm Hazelrigg."

And Wendover came off it.

"Congratulations," said he coldly. "Damned clever." And extending his hand, added, as though they had just been introduced:

"How do you do, Hazelrigg?"

Hazelrigg laughed.

"The same to you, old chap. How do you do and how do you do it? For it's very very good. You ought to join us. If I hadn't known, you'd have taken me in completely, and that's saying something."

"You certainly took me in," snapped Wendover.

"Well, it's my trade, as you know. I am a professional. And if you are an amateur, I can only say you ought to turn pro. forthwith. Come on along with me, now."

Wendover shook his head.

"You know me, Hazelrigg, and you know my story, presumably."

"And that, my dear Wendover, is precisely what I do. I know your story. The truth of it, I mean."

"Well then, what's the good of suggesting that I should join you?"

"Because I intend that everybody else shall know the truth of your story."

"That's awfully good of you, Hazelrigg, but I don't know that *I* do. I am not greatly interested, either way. On the whole, I'm a good deal happier here, now, than I used to be," lied Wendover.

"Not you, Wendover. Though it is a splendid idea to think you are—if you do think it. And though I couldn't offer you a permanent post straight away, why not come along with me until I can? Think of the times we'd have together."

"Yes, and think of the times I should have when I ran into people who knew me when I was Wendover of Napier's Horse."

"Yes. But all that would come later. You can stay as much a Pathan as my Mahbub Ali or Shere Khan until the time comes."

"What time?"

"The time when I've done what I am going to do. Got to the truth of the matter and published it."

"Didn't the Court-Martial do that?"

"You know they didn't."

"Well, they thought they did, anyway. So does everybody who ever heard of the case. Wasn't I found blind drunk—with a couple of empty whisky bottles?"

"No, you were found drugged—with a couple of empty whisky bottles planted on you."

"I've often wondered."

"But damn it all, man, you know perfectly well you didn't go to bed with a couple of bottles of whisky and drink them, neat, don't you?"

"To be quite honest, Hazelrigg, I don't. As a matter of actual fact, I don't know at all what I did

that night. I can remember feeling frightfully ill, tired and sleepy, and taking a good stiff peg of whisky-and-soda to pull me together; and that's the last thing I do remember. Whether I emptied the bottle and got another one, I don't know. If I did, you can't blame the Court-Martial for their finding and sentence. And yet, in a way, it doesn't seem a very heinous crime, for it was unconscious. I'm not blaming Colonel Maldon for saying I was dead drunk, nor Colonel Matheson and the others for believing it, but you really might just as well blame a somnambulist for what he did when he was sleep-walking."

"Of course you might," agreed Ganesh Hazelrigg. "But that wasn't it at all."

"What I mean to say is," continued Wendover, "I should never, in my right senses, and knowing what I was doing, have dreamed of such a thing as drinking half a bottle of whisky, much less a whole one, least of all a couple. And yet—there it was."

"No, it wasn't," contradicted Hazelrigg. "Of course it wasn't. Did you ever get drunk in your life?"

"No. No. I can't say I ever did. Of course I have known many a very wet night in Mess, special occasions and big guest-nights when the fun went on until daylight, and that sort of thing."

"Yes. Yes. Like everybody else," agreed Hazelrigg.

"But I've always put myself to bed," continued Wendover, "and been bright and early for parade in the morning; and I have always clearly remembered everything that happened the night before. No, I've never been drunk."

"Got a pretty good head?"

"Yes, very good. Not that I've ever tried it to the limit. On a night of uplift, I have had, say, a couple of sherries or cocktails before dinner, a bottle of champagne with dinner, a couple of glasses of port after dinner, and then, later in the evening perhaps, a couple of brandies-and-soda over snooker. And a night-cap to help the last guest off, sort of thing. That has been about my wildest and wickedest effort in the debauchery line."

"And none the worse for it?"

"Bless me, no. Could have sat down and written next day's orders for the Colonel, if he had wanted me to; or filled up a dozen Army forms in triplicate; or danced three rounds with the General's wife."

"Then it was something pretty tough that knocked you out, at Ubele?"

"Yes. I shouldn't have thought even a couple of bottles of whisky would have put me under so completely and for so long. Not if I had drunk them nicely and quietly between drinks . . . I wonder what it was?"

"Well, there's one thing," he added, yawning. "We shall never know."

"Shan't we? I'm not so sure," replied Hazelrigg. "Not by any means so sure. I've talked about it, not mentioning your name, of course, but as a hypothetical similar case, to lots of doctors; and I've got some ideas."

Hazelrigg sat silent for awhile.

"Had that doctor chap, who gave evidence against you, got any special grudge against you?" he asked suddenly.

"Grudge? No. Why should he? I had to twist his tail a bit, but . . ."

"But not to that extent, eh?"

"Had you had any dealings with him before you were shut up together in Ubele?" he added.

"Dealings? No. I had met him in Madrutta when I was seconded there from Najierpur. Used to see him at the Club and Gymkana, and came across him officially, now and then, when I was Staff Captain."

"Ever met his father, the Superintendent of Police?"

"No. Heard a good deal about him. Great lad, wasn't he?"

"Wonderful policeman. Wonderful. Of course he had a big pull over a man from Home, being bred and born in the country, and knowing the native from inside, so to speak. They all loved him, even those whom he pinched. Quite a hero with the criminal gangs, though they used to shoot him up, occasionally. The police sepoy worshipped him. They'd have done anything for him.

"*Or for his son,*" he added.

"Yes? Fond of him too, were they?"

"I don't know so much about that, but . . . for the father's sake, I mean. I fancy he could have got away with anything, so far as the police sepoy were concerned."

"Valuable asset for a young man about town."

"The town of Madrutta, yes. I fancy he made use of it too."

"Eh?"

"Yes. I've been taking quite an interest in him. Do you know where he is now?"

"No. Where?"

"Up in Killa Giltraza with the same old lot. Half-battalion garrison."

"Oh, he's still doing regimental work, is he?"

"Yes. He's not *persona* peculiarly *grata* to the authorities."

"What's he been up to?"

"That's what they don't know. But there are funny tales; and he's got some funny friends. Nothing against him much—officially. And precious little for him."

"I never liked him," observed Wendover.

"No, I don't think anybody does much, but that's what I'm getting at. Did you show it very plainly?"

"Well, as I say, I had to twist his tail."

"For what?"

"Oh, general slackness and an absolutely wrong attitude to his job, not only as a doctor but as a gazetted officer. Thick as thieves with his Indian pals, and they weren't too satisfactory. Quite one with them, if you know what I mean. Definitely much more their friend than mine."

"Any special and particular row when you went for him bald-headed and said the sort of thing he'd never forget—although you might forget it next minute?" asked Hazelrigg.

"Well," said Wendover. "If there was, I've forgotten it. Of course, one's nerves were a bit on edge and one's patience wore a trifle thin, what with one thing and another. And I am apt to say quite what I mean."

"Yes. But you don't remember any special row?"

"No. No. It was just one damned thing after

another. Oh yes, I do remember telling him just what I thought of him when he connived with the Subedar-Major to conceal from me the fact that, owing to the blighter's laziness and damned disobedience, a good sepoy had been drowned and his rifle and ammunition lost. I'm not altogether in favour of the drowning of sepoys at any time, but a man was a man just then, and a rifle was a rifle."

"Oh! Connived with the Subedar-Major, did he?"

"Yes. And as luck would have it, two of the other native officers were the Subedar-Major's brother and brother-in-law or something of the sort. There were no less than three native officers in that battalion, who were related, by birth or marriage, and of course they all hung together. And our Breckinge made himself a fourth. You'd have thought a fellow who had got such an almighty swipe of the tar-brush would have been all the other way, wouldn't you? Stood on his Englishness and all that. But no, he was as Indian as any of them—especially after I had had to tell him off, once or twice . . . Well, I happened to miss this sepoy, and I had the deuce-and-all of a job to find out what had happened to him. Up against the usual brick wall of blind native *What-do-I-know?* and although Breckinge knew all about the case, those were the very words he used when I questioned him. And then I *did* go for him. Good and proper."

"I've no doubt it was good," smiled Hazelrigg, "but was it proper? Or was it vulgar abuse? Nasty words like *banchūt*?"

"Oh, no, no. Nothing of the sort. I don't go in for *gulli* when talking to a native, or a Eurasian. I spoke to him as Lieutenant Breckinge, I.M.S., just

as I should have spoken to any other Lieutenant who had been guilty of gross breach of duty on top of thoroughly unsatisfactory work and conduct."

"Just cut him to ribbons in correct and well-chosen English, eh?"

"Yes. I told him exactly what I thought of him, and promised him a Court-Martial."

"Ah! You did, eh? And the Subedar-Major whose laziness and disobedience had caused the drowning of the sepoy—did you promise him a Court-Martial too?"

"I did."

"And how long was that before you took to drink?"

"Oh, a day or two before."

"Very interesting . . . And a messenger arrived—got through and said that the relief was close at hand, and would arrive next day—and that the siege was practically raised."

"So they said at the Court-Martial. I knew nothing about it."

"No, you were asleep. Wrapped in sottish swinish slumber. And thus the message went to Breckinge, who acknowledged its receipt in writing, with signature in full; and sent the runner back with it, eh?"

"So I learned at the Court-Martial."

"And that night you went on the booze—and never lived to tell the tale."

Wendover glanced at the speaker.

"To tell the tale of the misconduct of the Medical Officer and the Subedar-Major—to a Court-Martial."

"No, got the Court-Martial myself, instead," said Wendover.

"Yes; very very interesting."

"Well, it's all over and done with, now," yawned Wendover.

"And that's just what it's not, my son. Just what it's not."

"Well, I hope it is. What would be the good of raking it all up again? Supposing what I have always imagined was true, and that Breckinge put half a dozen morphia tablets in my tea-pot—there wasn't any coffee—you don't suppose he did it before witnesses, do you?"

"No; nor that he'd ever confess to having done it. It isn't likely, is it?" admitted Hazelrigg. "Nevertheless, that's what happened, Wendover. Only it wasn't morphia."

"How do you know it wasn't?"

"Because I've talked with better and bigger doctors than Breckinge. It wasn't morphia. And it's a bit of a puzzle to know what drug it was that gave you not only forty-eight hours' heavy sleep, but various other symptoms that you displayed."

"How do you know what symptoms I displayed?"

"Well, I made it my business to study the report of that Court-Martial pretty carefully."

"Well, there were no symptoms described in the report, were there?"

"No; but having studied the report of the Court-Martial, I then also studied the members. Every man of them. And one or two of them were men with gleams of intelligence; especially a chap named Brace. I had a long talk with him. Nice feller. He told me that, had he been sole judge, his verdict would have been '*Obviously guilty but patently impossible,*' with a rider, '*Dead drunk, from cause or causes unknown, especially to the prisoner himself.*'"

"Why? Did he have a notion that I had been drugged?"

"Yes. He told me that that most certainly occurred to him; and that he rejected it as palpably absurd—unless you had a private store of some such narcotic as opium or laudanum or morphia or something like that, and had taken a more or less suicidal dose of it. And that struck him as being every bit as bad as taking a suicidal dose of whisky."

"Yes, I suppose it would. Come to think of it, a gentleman who seeks oblivion from care, with knock-out drops, is every bit as bad as one who seeks it with a bottle of the Old and Bold."

"Absolutely, provided it was a definite and intentional attempt at escape from sin and sorrow, grief and pain."

"That's the actual evidence," he mused. "I suppose if you had drunk two cases of whisky instead of the alleged two bottles, and it had had no more effect than half a pint of cold water, no one would have had a word to say about it. You would have committed no offence, provided you were on the spot for duty every time."

"Quite so, and if I had taken one tablet of morphia, knowing that it would put me out for forty-eight hours, I should have deserved all I got. But I didn't. I neither drank two bottles of whisky, so far as I know, nor did I take morphia or any other drug. For one thing, it is not a habit of mine; and for another, I hadn't got any to take, if I had wanted to do so."

"Therefore . . ." prompted Hazelrigg.

"Therefore, I was drugged by someone else."

"And that someone else?"

"Somebody who stood to gain by my not being in a position to get him Court-Martialed and broke."

"And he was? . . ."

"The doctor—and the Subedar-Major."

"And of those two the likely one was . . ."

"The doctor—because he'd have the drugs and know the proper use of them. Or the improper use."

"Obviously. There's no shadow of doubt in my mind; no possible question about it," asserted Hazelrigg.

"There is in mine, though," smiled Wendover.

"Why? How?"

"It is just possible that I was so very near the end of my tether—and mind you I had had less sleep, more work, and ten times more responsibility than anybody in the place—that I went on drinking unconsciously, took a second drink without noticing what I was doing, and then a third absent-mindedly, and a fourth subconsciously. And then was so affected, in my abnormal physical and mental condition, that I simply didn't know what I was doing, and went on drinking; and, having emptied one bottle, went and fetched another and uncorked that, and drank that, too. It's possible."

"Oh, anything's possible, my good ass; but we have got to take count of probabilities. Is it probable?"

"No. Neither is it probable that an officer of the Indian Medical Service should do a thing like that."

"Does a leopard change his spots if you give him a coat of paint? Does the Eurasian, of very bad maternal stock, change his fundamental nature because you give him a coat of Service cloth? Had he been a white man, the ordinary normal British doctor, the idea would not have entered my head."

"No, and it didn't enter the heads of the members of the Court-Martial either," said Wendover.

"More's the pity. I wish to God I had been on the Court-Martial."

"My dear chap, suppose you had. Would you not have accepted the fact as they did, that Colonel Maldon found me drunk? Found the evidence of the cause of the drunkenness? Empty bottles, and a beautiful stink of whisky; and the testimony of a dozen people, one of whom was a doctor? Of course you would."

"Do you think so?"

"I do."

"Well, I don't. I'd have rejected all the evidence, and the evidence of my own eyes, on the strength of your record, your personality, habits, standards."

"Aren't judges supposed to keep an absolutely open mind, and to be utterly unprejudiced, whether by a previous bad record or a good record? Haven't they got to judge on the facts put before them?"

"Well, weren't you yourself one of the facts? Didn't they know that you . . ."

"They didn't know me, nor anything about me, except that British officers, brothers-in-arms and all that, had seen me snoring, hoggish, drunk, cuddling an empty whisky bottle, with another one on the floor beside me."

"Well? That would merely have presented me with an interesting problem—the question of how that state of affairs came about. I should have started with the premise that most certainly and unquestionably you had not drunk the whisky, and that you were not drunk, and that the whole thing was a plant. Then I should have started looking for the gardener

and, to find him, should have enquired for reasons, objects and motives for the planting of the plant. And I'd soon have had the little weed up by the roots and had a look at 'em."

"And I wonder what you'd have found."

"I'll tell you what I should have found. Precisely what I'm going to find, yet."

"And if you did, there isn't much point in locking the stable door after the horse is gone, is there?"

"Hardly the metaphor. There'd be some point in going and finding the horse and fetching him in out of the cold, and then locking the door, wouldn't there?"

"If you could catch him. Some horses prefer—freedom."

"Wild horses, perhaps—or asses."

The two men smoked in silence for awhile.

"Yes," said Hazelrigg suddenly. "I wish I had been on that Court-Martial. It is perfectly maddening to think that Brace actually had the idea and nothing came of it. But there again, your luck was out. You were fated, my son. Kismet. It had to be for some good reason."

"Good reason?"

"Yes. Everything is for a good reason."

"My God! The good part is pretty well hidden sometimes, isn't it?"

"Yes. But among the few things of which I am certain in this uncertain life is the great truth that we don't know our blessings from our curses."

"Get a pretty good idea, sometimes, don't we?"

"We think we do—at the moment. And sooner or later—sometimes a lot later, I admit—we say, or we ought to say, 'Well, well. But for that apparent catas-

trophe, this excellent state of affairs could never have come about.' "

" I'll remember it next time I stub my toe in the dark," promised Wendover.

" You were saying," he continued, " that my luck was out over Brace. How was that? It wasn't merely luck that he rejected the idea of a drug unless it were a self-administered one."

" That's the whole point. I went to see Brace in Bombay. Asked him to dinner; and, afterwards, we fairly got down to it, and I turned him inside out, on the subject of the Court-Martial. He was only too willing to talk and be helpful, for he's a man with a conscience as well as gleams of intelligence.

" And when we came to the point of symptoms, and he said that it actually had occurred to him to wonder whether it might not have been some other narcotic than alcohol that had put you under so completely and for so long, he remembered an incident that had impressed him rather deeply at the moment, but had receded towards the back of his mind as time went on. Being on active service, he had had something else to think about, and wasn't, moreover, particularly receptive of impressions. And the incident was this.

" He was in charge of part of an advancing firing-line, and during a lull he was walking up and down behind his men, who were lying in open order at the edge of a belt of jungle, waiting for the word to jump up and dash across a belt of open country into the bush on the other side. Before the order came to advance, word was passed along for the doctor, and a messenger came by, looking for him. He said the

Colonel Sahib had been wounded, but intended to go on. He wanted the doctor to come and bandage him.

"Brace directed him to where he had last seen a peripatetic Red Cross outfit, a doctor, a mule with panniers, a medical-subordinate and stretcher-bearers. A little while after, the man came back, leading the medical party. Just as they passed where Brace was standing looking through his glasses into the jungle across the wide glade, heavy firing suddenly broke out again from over the way, at about a hundred yards range, and several people were hit, not to mention the mule, which promptly stampeded.

"Brace shouted his orders for 'rapid-independent,' and the firing, from over the way, died down. When he looked round, he saw that the doctor himself had been hit, and that he was lying on his back and trying to get at something in the breast-pocket of his tunic.

"The rest of his party were either hit or chasing the mule which, after all, was nearly as important as the doctor, as it had got all the bandages and surgical implements in the panniers.

"So, bending over the doctor, Brace asked if he could do anything for him.

"'Yes,' was the reply. 'Small phial here.'

"And, unbuttoning the pocket which had a rather small tight button-hole, Brace found one of those little cylinders of white tablets. The doctor held out his open hand, not to take the bottle, but with fingers and thumb tightly together, obviously wanting him to give him some of the contents.

"'How many?' asked Brace.

"'The whole lot,' said the doctor.

"'All of them?' asked Brace, to be quite sure.

“ ‘ *Yes, all of them,* ’ said the doctor most distinctly.

“ So Brace tipped the lot into his hand. About a couple of dozen of them, he said, whereupon the doctor put them in his mouth—the whole lot, every one of them, and swallowed them. And died soon afterwards.

“ Brace learned later that the doctor had swallowed a whole bottle of morphia tablets ; and that, although he had been hit twice, neither of the wounds was in the least dangerous. He had committed suicide. He was an experienced, fully-qualified doctor.

“ Also a full-blooded Indian,” added Hazelrigg.

“ H’m, I see the point,” observed Wendover. “ Brace had rather got self-administered drugs on the brain, eh ? ”

“ Yes. We talked for hours, and I don’t think there was a thing left unsaid that had any bearing on that Court-Martial and your appearance, conduct and demeanour. I refrained from saying ‘ Why the Hell didn’t you say so, if you had the slightest suspicion that it might have been a case of drugging ? ’ because it was quite evident that, although the idea had crossed Brace’s mind, he had dismissed it as ninety-nine people out of a hundred would have done, because the evidence for drunkenness was so very, very strong ; because there was medical evidence which was really irrefutable by a layman as to the cause of your unconscious state ; and because the drug idea merely passed through his mind without effecting lodgment. And for those two reasons—first, because, if it were drugs, you had obviously drugged yourself as he had seen that doctor do ; and, secondly, if it weren’t drugs, it was alcohol, as this doctor testified.”

“ And who shall blame the blameless Captain

Brace? " observed Wendover. "Nobody. Especially when one remembers that he was a very junior Captain in the presence of his seniors, including two Majors and a Colonel, and that the evidence was overwhelming—the fact being proved by a Colonel and the cause proved by a doctor."

"No, it's impossible to blame him," agreed Hazelrigg. "Nevertheless the drug idea entered his mind, thank God, and he remembers it"

"And if he had had the courage or impudence to say what he thought," observed Wendover, "what would he have got but a metaphorical kick in the pants for presuming to know better than a doctor and a Colonel, not to mention the other witnesses?"

"Exactly. It wouldn't have made the slightest difference if he had said that, in his wisdom, he doubted the accuracy of the doctor's diagnosis and suspected drugs. But—and thank God once again—he did have the audacity to mention his suspicion to another member of the Court-Martial afterwards. He did say to Captain Marvin, a friend of his, that he had a sort of feeling there was something queer about the business, because the accused most certainly did not strike him as a man who used liquor to that extent, and he did look like a man who had had an overdose of something like opium or hashish, or chloral, or morphia."

"Yes," mused Hazelrigg, "Brace had gleams of intelligence, and an eye in his head. At times, positively observant."

"What did Marvin reply?" asked Wendover.

"Apparently he uttered a coarse and monosyllabic ejaculation, expressive of derisive dissent, and bade Brace get up and make a speech. Said that

thereafter Brace had better write a monograph on the extreme difficulties of deciding whether a man was drunk or not ; because if there was any doubt, he might not be ; and when there wasn't any doubt, he probably wouldn't be, because he'd be drugged.

" And when Brace made a feeble effort to pursue the subject, Marvin told him he had better go and see the Commander-in-Chief about it ; that so far as he, Marvin, was concerned, he'd trust old Maldon to know a drunk when he saw one ; and he'd also be strongly inclined to accept the evidence of a couple of empty whisky bottles and a doctor's testimony."

" And, once again, who shall blame him ? " observed Wendover.

" True. Far from it. Let's praise him. For it may make all the difference, some day, that he raised the point."

" How ? Difference in what way ? To whom ? "

" You wait and see. Well, then I pursued Marvin, who was up at Poona ; contrived to run into him in the bar at the Club of Western India, and talked about *shikar*, which is his subject. And so from Indian tigers to African lions, and the fate of one Wendover who was eaten by a lion. And thus to the Court-Martial. Oh, yes ; he remembered all right. Nasty business. One of the most unpleasant and painful affairs he ever had anything to do with.

" ' Had he quite agreed with the verdict and evidence ? ' I asked."

" ' Good Lord, yes. No possible question of the justice of the verdict or, in point of fact, the leniency of the sentence. Oh, yes ; plain case of drunk on duty. Blind drunk on active service, too. And there

wasn't anything to be said in mitigation. It wasn't as though Wendover had known that relief was near and certain, and that he could therefore let up and hand over. It was quite clearly proved that he was dead to the world when the runner got through with the news that Maldon had won a victory, turned the enemy's flank, got them on the run, and would be at Ubele in a day or two.'

"Then I asked him if he remembered Brace's theory. Fortunately he did. Remembered it with a laugh. Yes, if he hadn't put a spoke in the silly beggar's wheel, he'd have made an everlasting ass of himself. Seemed to think that he might know better than the doctor, not to mention Maldon, who presumably knows a drunken man when he sees him, even if he isn't surrounded by dead bottles and a powerful stink of whisky. And so forth.

"Well, there were two of the five who had, at any rate, had the drug idea before them at the trial.

'And then I set myself to try to instil doubts into that undoubting mind.

" 'Did Wendover look like a habitual drunkard?' I asked Marvin.

"No, he wouldn't say that. No, certainly not.

"Had he ever heard of him as a drinker?

"No, he hadn't.

'Did he think it likely that a man of Wendover's sort would go to bed with a couple of bottles of whisky, at a critical point in the siege of a place he had defended most ably for weeks and weeks?

"No, it was incredible.

"Well then, if it were incredible?

"Exactly. Nothing but cold solid proof could

make it credible. And there it was. Can't get away from facts. An amazing case. Last man in the world he would have suspected of doing such a thing as that. But you never knew. You never knew. 'Look at that case of So-and-So. Devoted husband, charming wife. Known 'em both for years. You'd say they had never had a wry word. And then, one day, he went home and shot her. And then went to the D.S.P., gave himself up and said he wondered he hadn't done it long ago.'

"And now," continued Hazelrigg, after a slight pause, "I intend to set about finding the 'cold solid proof.' To have you reinstated, put once more in command of your men, in charge of your own job, among your own people."

"In command of my men," repeated Wendover slowly. "Yes; almost you persuade me that it would be worth while; that I would do anything . . . *anything* . . . to get back to all that I have lost. My men, my work, my friends—all that made life worth living. But of course, it's no good. It's too late."

"Wait," said Hazelrigg. "You wait a little longer."

"*Wait!*" Wendover laughed, without conspicuous merriment.

PART IV

CHAPTER I

CAPTAIN ALEXANDER BRECKINGE of the Indian Medical Service, was a worried, anxious and, if truth be told, a frightened man.

Fate was indeed playing him a dirty trick. Enough is as good as a feast, and sometimes a great deal better, or worse ; and Captain Breckinge had had very much more than enough. To be shut up in a besieged fort once is quite sufficient for a lifetime—Captain Breckinge's lifetime, anyway—and here he was for a second time in that extremely parlous and uncomfortable predicament.

Damn it all, he wasn't a soldier and didn't wish to be one. He was a doctor, and it is no part of a doctor's business to be shot, slashed, starved or tortured to death.

And not only was Fate playing a dirty trick but it was trying to be funny into the bargain. It was being what is termed ironical ; for, on the former occasion when he had been besieged and suffering every kind of discomfort, privation and danger, he had been only too anxious to undermine and thwart the authority of the man in command, and actually to terminate that authority as soon as he knew that relief was at hand. And now, when he would have given anything to support the Commanding Officer, to strengthen his position, and to see him in fullest control, not only of the situation, but of his great faculties for command, the wretched man was *hors de combat*.

Not only that, but in spite of all Captain Breckinge could do, he was getting worse, mentally and physically. Instead of being a tower of strength, a host in himself, and the main-stay of the defence, he was lying there on his string-bed in his quarters, alternating between delirium, when he could only babble nonsense, and a state of semi-collapse, in which he could only whisper half-audible replies to half-comprehended questions as to what was to be done.

If he didn't soon recover sufficiently to take command, the Fort would undoubtedly be captured—and Captain Breckinge put to death with the rest of its defenders.

And though Subedar-Major Ganga Charan was the doctor's admiring and obliging friend, the very man to back him up in any little business where native cunning, artfulness and convincing witness were required, he wasn't exactly the man whom Captain Breckinge would have chosen as a sure shield and stout defence in time of trouble of this sort, a desperate situation of the gravest physical danger. The Subedar-Major was getting a bit elderly now, a bit on the fat side, and not precisely an ideal leader of forlorn hopes or desperate defences.

Nor were his relatives and henchmen, Subedar Gopal Mangal and Jemadar Rama Narayen or Jemadar Ganpat Mahadeo, just quite the supports whom Captain Breckinge would have chosen when his life depended upon having about him men of the highest courage, the stoutest heart, and greatest resource and initiative. Fine staunch fellows to back one up in a little *banao*,¹ and see one through an awkward little business of a

¹ *Plot ; swindle ; frame-up.*

different kind, but not perhaps quite the perfect opponents for hordes of ferocious Pathans, deadly, determined and relentless.

No, it was a horrible position to be in.

What right had the British Military Authorities to occupy a fort in theoretically tributary country, all these miles from India and from any military base? And if not hundreds of miles, it might as well be that, when you came to consider the passes, one of them snowed up for most of the year; the unbridged rushing torrents; the wretched road which, in places, was under water, in others, under avalanches of shale, and in some parts, was supported on rotting props as it clung, crumbling, to the sheer side of a perpendicular mountain, with a thousand feet of precipice on one side and an overhanging unscaleable cliff on the other.

What right had they to occupy so isolated and distant a fort with so small and unsupported a garrison?

All very well to say that it was connected by telegraph and telephone with the Khyber. A lot of good that was, when the wild tribesmen were out, and the wires were cut as a matter of course.

And the rations, too. One would have thought that however callous was the fool who decided that the place was to be occupied, he would have realized that it might be besieged, and would at least have taken the trouble to see that it was always kept stocked and provisioned against such a possibility.

But no, he was never likely to be caught here.

And what was the result now? Half-rations, and if the siege went on long enough, it would be quarter-rations, and both food and ammunition dwindling to vanishing point.

And the only means of communication with the Base was by means of messengers who were either promptly captured by the besiegers or, having got through them, succumbed to danger and hardship, and fell by the wayside.

All except one, that was to say. One of them would reach his destination all right.

And besides, if telephone and telegraph had been working, and suppose there had been anyone who could have seen the heliograph when there were signallers to operate it, everybody knew it was only possible for a relief force to cross the snowed-up passes at one season of the year.

It was abominable.

Bad enough, in guaranteed peace-time, to stick people like Captain Breckinge down here to die of boredom, but in the event of war . . . It didn't bear thinking about.

And yet here it was, an actual reality, and here was Major Denbrough—not to mention a score or so of other ranks—down with typhoid, and doing about as badly as could be expected, in view of the fact that there was nothing left in the place but bully-beef and biscuit. And what with the relapse and the fact that the fool was always trying to get out of bed and resume command, it was pretty certain that he'd have a perforation and bleed to death.

And no doubt they'd blame the medical officer for the outbreak of typhoid, as usual. Say he hadn't chlorinated the water properly or something of the kind.

It was a burning shame. Some of those fat Generals at Peshawar or 'Pindi or Simla ought to be in the place, starving to death, and with the yelling tribesmen picking men off all day long and making sudden assaults all

night—or, at any rate, very frequently at night, as well as at dawn.

And there was no doubt that since Major Denbrough had collapsed, having carried on as long as he could stand on his feet, sit on a chair, or give an order from his bed when he could no longer sit up, the defenders had begun to go to pieces.

No, Subedar-Major Ganga Charan was not the man he had been.

And the sepoys had definitely got their tails down. Not only was there a terrible lot of genuine sickness, what with typhoid, malaria and the usual illnesses of a starving, confined and despondent force, but there was undeniably a good deal of malingering.

So what was to happen? What was to happen? The enemy were getting ever bolder and more active, and while the numbers of the defenders decreased, those of the besiegers were augmented daily.

There could be but one end to it. And it was not as though these terrible mountaineers were a civilized enemy. There was no question of an honourable captivity, and release at the end of the war. When, at last, they succeeded in burning down the gate and bursting through, or in swarming over the walls, it would be slaughter, butchery, a massacre. The survivors would be put to death in cold blood. Quite possibly tortured, too. He had heard horrible tales.

And Captain Breckinge shuddered.

§ 2

Major John Denbrough, D.S.O., or the remnant of that once brawny, brilliant and forceful man, lay and

gazed at the bare baked-clay walls and ceiling of his room in Giltraza Fort, his body almost too feeble for the moving of a finger or the speaking of a word, his mind clear and his thoughts coherent.

So this was the end.

A good end in a way, for he was dying at his post. Not too bad, but it might have been better. He would have preferred to die in his boots and to be killed by bullet, *tulwar*, or tribesman's knife to dying of sickness, killed by a foul water-borne germ.

Still, although lying undressed on a *charpai*, he was dying in harness, and he had held the Fort as long as he could stand and see; he had led the defence night and day until he lost consciousness; and although he had gone down, had been carried to bed, had been either unconscious or delirious for so much of the time, and in the intervals too weak to move, he had kept the flag flying, and saved the Fort.

For relief would soon come.

The authorities must have suspected that something was wrong as soon as communication ceased; and must, before very long, have discovered that it was not merely a case of a break-down in the line owing to snow in the high pass, or to gales.

And surely at least one of the heroic messengers must have got through.

And if not a single runner had survived, with a few words pencilled on a cigarette-paper, or merely a verbal message, rumour must have reached the Khyber and Peshawar that the Tribes were out in the far North-West, the passes closed, and Fort Giltraza besieged.

The chances were that some Military Intelligence agent, British or native, in some such place as Kunar,

Dir, Drosh, Chitral, Hunza, or Gilgit, had heard a bazaar-rumour of a confederation of the notorious Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot and the Tribesmen being on the war-path and having a shot at mopping up Fort Giltraza, wiping out the garrison, and collaring the rifles.

Yes, of course relief would soon come ; and although he would not be there to see it, to hear what the Brigadier had to say, or to read agreeable things in the papers when he got back to civilization, he could die in peace, if not in comfort ; he could die content, if not happy, in the knowledge that he had done his duty.

Rough on poor Helen and young Anthony and Dorothy, but . . .

The dying soldier closed his eyes.

The door opened and Breckinge entered the bare, comfortless ill-lit cell that was Major Denbrough's sick-room.

Hullo, had he passed out ?

The doctor took the sick man's wrist.

H'm. Collapse temperature. Heart only just beating.

Major Denbrough's eyes opened and his lips moved as he whispered inaudibly.

"What did you say ?" asked Breckinge, bending down to catch the words scarcely formed by the white lips. "What's that ?"

Silence.

What about an injection of . . .

Ah, that was better. Speaking quite distinctly.

"They are coming. I *know* they're coming. They'll soon be here . . . Hold on . . . Hold on

tight, Breckinge . . . Stiffen the men up . . . Stiffen them. Tell them I know that British troops are coming . . . They are near . . . Go and fetch Subedar-Major Ganga Charan."

"Yes, yes, that's all right," replied Breckinge.

Easy to talk. Denbrough had been saying that they were coming, that they were quite near, for days. Every time he had had a lucid interval.

'*Stiffen them up!*' Fat lot of good talking like that. How could you stiffen up starving men who knew they hadn't a dog's chance; knew they were completely surrounded, cut off, and couldn't possibly last out until relief came. Food and ammunition for a few weeks. No relief for months, perhaps. It was wicked, criminal, abominable. '*Stiffen them up!*' Pah!

"Do you hear me?" whispered the dying man. "Go and fetch Subedar-Major Ganga Charan . . . I'll see the others after . . . One at a time . . . Speak to each of them . . . They'll hold on . . . They must . . . The only thing to do, even for their own sakes . . . It's their only chance . . . Fetch Subedar-Major Ganga Charan."

Breckinge turned and went from the room.

Talk! Easy to talk. Denbrough was out of it, without getting his throat cut.

'*Hold on!*' *The only thing to do!* It was the one sure and certain way of being butchered! There was at least a chance the other way.

When he returned to the sick-room, a couple of hours later, Major Denbrough was lying on the floor, dead.

CHAPTER II

“**S**AHIB!” called Subedar Major Ganga Charan, opening the door of Breckinge’s room, his voice quivering with excitement, “there’s a Pathan at the gate. The sentry says the man marched straight up the track, with both hands above his head, holding up a white cloth in one of them. He’s unarmed; and when the sentry called out that he’d shoot if he came any nearer, the man shouted that he wanted to speak to the senior Officer. Said he had got a message from the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot, Commander of the *lashkar*.”

“Quite alone? Unarmed? No chance of treachery?” asked Breckinge quickly, hopefully.

“No, Sahib. None at all. Nobody with him. There can’t be anybody nearer than their *sangars* and the trench on that side.”

“Mightn’t there be a sudden rush if you opened the gates and let him in?”

“No. They could only make the usual attack. He could be admitted in half a minute. He’d be inside before they were a few yards from their position.”

“Come and talk to him from the wall, Sahib,” added the Subedar-Major.

“What, and get shot? It’s a trick.”

“You could shout to him from cover, all right, Sahib. Or someone else could talk to him—saying what you told him to say. But they wouldn’t take

all this trouble on the chance of getting a shot at one man on the wall.

"It would be quite safe to bring him in," he added, with something of eagerness in his tone.

"All right, then. You should know best. You can take every precaution. If he slips in quickly, there cannot be any harm in admitting him, and hearing what he has to say.

"*Bahut achcha*,¹ Sahib," replied the Subedar-Major, apparently pleased with this decision, and hurried from the room.

It was not the doctor's habit to venture upon the walk behind the embrasures of the high walls of the Fort, or otherwise to risk his life, so valuable to the health and general welfare of the defenders of the place. Nor, since the collapse of Major Denbrough, the last of the combatant officers, had he in any way accepted a position of responsibility for anything but the medical services of the Fort. Nevertheless he had not only given his advice when it had been sought by the Subedar-Major, but had insisted upon that responsible officer consulting him in all matters outside his regular routine military duty.

In the extremely distressing situation resultant upon the death of Major Denbrough, the position which Captain Alexander Breckinge, I.M.S., preferred to establish was one in which he had ultimate unquestioned authority, and Subedar-Major Ganga Charan sole responsibility.

Let Captain Breckinge freely pull the strings and Subedar-Major Ganga Charan fully answer for the results.

¹ *Very good.*

The Subedar-Major returned.

"I have admitted him, Sahib," he said, "and there was no ruse about it. No enemy moved, and no shot was fired. The man will not talk. What he has to say, is to be said to you."

"Well, I don't command this Fort. I'm the Medical Officer."

"He says his message is for the Doctor Sahib," replied the Subedar-Major.

"They don't think I'm going out to attend to any of their wounded, do they?" said Breckinge. "What the devil next?"

"It would be just like the Pathan," he mused aloud. "They have a sense of humour all their own. Besiege us here, do their damndest to kill the lot of us, and then send us a message to say:

"'Oh, by the way, we should be much obliged if the Doctor would call, some time this morning, as the Hadji has got a bullet in his stomach, and it wants attending to.'"

"Perhaps the Sahib could make some sort of terms with them, in return for doctoring their leader," suggested the Subedar-Major.

"How do you mean?"

"Perhaps if you did what they asked, they'd give us a week's truce in return for their leader's life, or something of the sort."

Breckinge thought a while. The Subedar-Major knew nothing of the message that had been sent to the Hadji. Doubtless this envoy brought the Hadji's answer and terms. No need for the Subedar-Major to know anything about the matter.

"There is something in that," he said.

And there might be something better, he reflected. If he could save whomever it was they wanted him to operate on, they might treat him well ; might keep him there until their Hadji or Khan or General or Chief, or whoever he might be, was out of danger. They might keep himself a (willing) prisoner until the Fort fell. Thus he would escape the massacre. He might make himself invaluable to them, until he got a chance of escape. They must have a lot of wounded. And when he got back to civilization he could tell his own story as to what had happened.

Anyway, it was a chance, and there was no chance of anything but a beastly death if he stayed here in the Fort—assuming that the Hadji refused to accept the terms he had offered him.

Or another idea—this man had come under a sort of flag of truce. Suppose he sent him back with it and a message to the effect that if they brought the wounded leader under a flag of truce, it would be respected, the leader would be taken into the Fort, and would be given every medical care and attention—provided hostilities were suspended.

They could make a hostage of him.

Directly the besiegers wished to end the truce, he could tell the Subedar-Major to take him up to the watch-tower above the gate, rig up some sort of a gallows, and threaten to hang him the moment a shot was fired. And do it, too. For if they were going to attack in any case, at least one of them should hang and it should be their leader, too. They'd get that much of their own back on them, anyway.

But it wouldn't come to that. They'd bargain, and exchange the leader's life for the Doctor's.

"Bring the man up here," he said. "Take good care that he is not armed, and see that he is blindfolded."

"I had him blindfolded immediately he was admitted, Sahib," replied the Subedar-Major.

"Why not have him permanently blinded?" he added, as he went out again.

Captain Breckinge took a loaded Service revolver from a holster which hung from a nail on the wall, and placed it on the rough table. This and a roorkie chair and a camp-bed were the main articles of furniture in the room.

A few minutes later, the Subedar-Major returned, accompanied by a file of sepoy, escorting a Pathan in *poshteen* coat, dirty grey cotton shirt and baggy trousers. On his feet were thick-soled heavy heel-less shoes with upturned toes; on his head a huge *puggri* loosely and roughly wound about a conical *kullah* cap.

The Subedar-Major removed the cloth that covered this envoy's eyes.

The man was heavily bearded, of unprepossessing appearance, grievously afflicted with a squint, and burly of person. His empty hands were raised to the level of his shoulders, palms outward.

"*Salaam aleikum*," said he ingratiatingly, and smiled greasily upon Captain Breckinge who, seated in his chair, his right hand lying on the table close to the butt of his revolver, stared at him without reply.

"This is the man, Sahib," said the Subedar-Major.

"Who are you?" asked Breckinge, in Pushtu.

"Ghulam Hyder," replied the man with a thick-lipped smirk that did nothing to improve the unprepossessing cast of his countenance.

"What do you want?"

"To speak with you, *Huzoor*," replied the Pathan in good Hindustani. "To bring a message and to take back an answer."

"Well, what's your message?"

"*Huzoor*, it is for you alone."

"You say what you've got to say, and be quick about it," replied Breckinge.

The man again smiled uneasily, looked down at his feet, shuffled uncomfortably, and looked up again at Breckinge.

"The *hukm* was that I speak to you with no one present, *Huzoor*. It is to be private between the Hadji and the Sahib.

"The Sahib's messenger reached the Hadji," he added meaningly.

Breckinge glanced up quickly.

"The Hadji's words are for the Sahib's ear alone. No one else is to hear them."

Breckinge thought quickly. Was this genuine? Was it an overture or an attempt at assassination? No. The man was unarmed, and he wouldn't try anything of that sort with his bare hands, against a man with a revolver. He could make him stand in the far corner, and keep the revolver pointed straight at him the whole time.

No, it wouldn't be an attempt at assassination. It wasn't as though he were Major Denbrough. They might have tried something of that sort with him, if they had thought of it, and could find a man willing to sacrifice his life to do it.

And it wouldn't be just a request for medical help if the Hadji or his only son or somebody of that sort

was dying for want of it. They wouldn't make any secrecy or mystery-mongering about that ; nor if they merely wanted to cadge some bandages and antiseptics in return for a short truce.

If it had been that, the man would have said so, straight out.

No, there was something behind this, and he would be a fool not to look into it. It might be extremely advantageous. In plain words, it might be a chance to save his life. The only chance, too. Besides, there was no need for the Subedar-Major to know what Breckinge's messenger had said to the Hadji. It was annoying that this fellow had referred to the matter before the Subedar-Major and the sepoys. However, he could easily deny it and say the man was a liar. All Pathans were well known to be most shocking liars.

Yes, he had better hear what the scoundrel had got to say, in private.

"All right, Subedar-Major Sahib," he said in Hindustani. "Leave him alone with me, and put a sentry ten paces from the door, with loaded rifle and fixed bayonet and instructions to rush in if I shout or if he hears a shot . . . You are taking special precautions, of course, while this man is here, in case the cunning devils have got some game on, that we haven't thought of."

"*Han*, Sahib," replied the Subedar-Major. "I have ordered *Stand-to* and every man who can hold a rifle is on the walls."

Breckinge nodded and the Subedar-Major retired, taking the sepoys with him.

As he did so, Breckinge took up the revolver and pointed it at the Pathan's chest.

"Stand over there," he said. "Over in that corner. And keep your hands in front of you. If you move one step forward, you'll get six shots into you. Understand?"

"*Bé-shak, Huzoor*," smiled the Pathan.

What an ugly, truculent and dangerous-looking tough the scoundrel was, thought Breckinge, as the man backed away and took up his stand in the corner of the room.

"Well, what have you got to say?" he snarled.

"Oh, much, *Huzoor*. Much. About your message. Proposals to make."

"From whom?"

"The Hadji and the leaders of the *lashkar*. That is to say, of the two *lashkars*. Three really. And another one is expected to arrive next week."

Breckinge was conscious of that sense of physical discomfort known as a sinking of the stomach. Three *lashkars*, and a fourth one coming. What hope was there? What possible chance?"

"Yes. Our leader doesn't like the Commander of the new one, the Mehtar of Lohistan and Halzit. He's a bad man."

"Oh, he's a bad man, is he?"

"A very bad man, *Huzoor*. Untrustworthy. Treacherous. And our Hadji wants this business finished before he comes."

"Oh, he does, does he?"

"Yes. And he's going to take this place at all costs, so that when the Mehtar of Lohistan and Halzit comes with his *lashkar*, he'll find the fruit has been plucked and is safe in our Hadji Saheb's pocket. I mean, he'll find us inside the Fort. He'll be a day after the *mela*.

He'll find he's too late. We shall be inside the Fort and the Mehtar will be outside, and he can turn round and go home again."

"Oh, you think you'll be inside the Fort, do you?"

"Without doubt, *Huzoor*. Why not? We know that half the garrison have been killed and half the rest are sick; and that you've got barely enough left to man the walls; and we have known for weeks that the British officers were sick, wounded or dead."

"And how did you know that?"

"By using our eyes. We haven't seen a helmet among the turbans for over a month. Also the last of your messengers—the messengers to the British, I mean—that we caught, had a lot to say. There wasn't much that he hadn't told us by the time we had finished with him."

"Well? What about it?"

"Why this. Why not save trouble, *Huzoor*. And the lives of your men and your own life."

"The Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot, as you call him, is anxious to save life, is he?" sneered Breckinge.

The Pathan leered, grinning.

"Anxious to save the lives of his own men, *Huzoor*," he replied. "He has lost quite enough already. He knows he can take the place now, whenever he likes, but he wants to do it as cheaply as he can. Naturally."

"And what makes him think he can take the Fort whenever he likes?"

"Because he knows exactly how many rounds of ammunition you have for each man. He knows how small your numbers are; and how weak from hunger and sickness are the few men left on the walls. And as he knows this, and that there are no British officers,

he also knows that he can take the place by assault whenever he wishes."

"Oh, does he?"

"Yes. And he wouldn't bother about an assault if the Mehtar of Lohistan and Halzit weren't on the way with his *lashkar*. He'd just starve you out."

Breckinge eyed the man in silence.

"Nothing on earth can save the place, *Huzoor*."

No. There was no doubt of it. Nothing on earth could save it, and nothing in Heaven would. A determined assault could not fail, and if the besiegers waited for the reinforcements already on their way, the certainty would be yet the more certain; their easy task the easier by reason of their overwhelming numbers and the yet further weakened state of the yet further depleted garrison.

It would be the sheerest folly to drive this man away with a defiant answer. Obviously they knew to the last detail the condition of the defence; and what he had said about it, and about the capture of the place, was the simple truth. The Fort could now only be held until it was resolutely attacked. And if the story of the approaching *lashkar* were false, and there was not going to be an assault, the end was only postponed, the agony prolonged. The enemy had but to sit there until they could scale the walls or burn down the gate unopposed, and walk straight into a place tenanted only by the dead and the dying, by scare-crow skeletons too weak to raise themselves, much less their weapons.

Breckinge's over-vivid imagination showed him a hideous picture.

He achieved a somewhat unconvincing laugh.

"Well, *budmash*," he said, "suppose every word of what you said were true—which of course it isn't—what about it? What's the proposal?"

"That you save your life and the lives of all your men by opening the gates and marching out."

"What? To be shot down, outside!" sneered Breckinge.

"No. The Hadji Saheb will give you safe-conduct."

"Where to?"

"Wherever you like to go."

Again Breckinge laughed.

"I think I know where we should go, once we were in your leader's hands, eh?"

"No, no, *Huzoor*," expostulated the Pathan. "What does it matter to our Hadji Saheb what happens to a handful of sick sepoy? What he wants is the Fort, and he wants to get into it before the Mehtar comes with his *lashkar*. The Mehtar is jealous of him, and he's not a real friend."

Breckinge laid the revolver down, ready to his hand, and leant back in his chair.

An idea! Suppose the scoundrelly Mehtar of Lohistan and Halzit were going to join in the next assault on Giltraza Fort, might not the besiegers quarrel among themselves before attacking? Might not the Hadji and the Mehtar fight a pitched battle?

Well, and what if they did? The victors would assault the Fort, just the same, afterwards. The garrison was, of course, far too weak to attempt a sally while the Tribesmen were fighting among themselves; and in any case, their doing so would only cause the enemy to sink their differences until the sepoy were disposed of.

No, there was nothing in that.

Still, he might see what this man had to say about it.

"Well," he said, "I think I'll wait until the Mehtar's *lashkar* arrives and attacks your Hadji."

"Attacks the Hadji Sahib?" replied the man, in apparent surprise. "Oh, he'd never do that, *Huzoor*. They are not enemies. It's only that the Mehtar is jealous of the Hadji, and would want more than his share of the credit and the loot. He'd spread the news all over the Border and Afghanistan and the countries round, that it was *he* who had captured the place. That's what he would do. Turn up at the last minute and take a hand in the final assault, and then pretend that nothing had been done until he came."

Yes, that was probably the truth of the matter. The Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot and the leaders of this confederation of Tribesmen would join forces with the Mehtar and they would not quarrel until it came to a division of the spoils. And this Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot, mullah or agitator or prophet or whatever he was, knowing that the Fort must fall in any case, was determined that it should do so before his rival came.

But could he be trusted?

No, of course not. Nevertheless, there was a chance, and a chance of life is better than a certainty of death.

"And you say that the Hadji offers to let us go free?"

"That's it, *Huzoor*. You open the gates and march out and go where you like. Not a shot will be fired. It is an even better chance for you than what your messenger proposed to the Hadji.

"Or was the messenger only a spy?" he added, leering.

"No, he wasn't a spy. He made a genuine offer . . . But who was ever fool enough to trust the word of a Pathan—without regretting it?" sneered Breckinge.

"Well, it's as you like, *Huzoor*. The Hadji Saheb could take the place to-morrow with the loss of a few men, and then the garrison would of course be put to the sword."

"Every man of them," he added, with a sinister grin at Breckinge.

It was the truth. God knew it was the truth.

"Why, I don't even know that you come from the Hadji with this foolish talk," Breckinge temporized.

The man laughed.

"Why should I risk my life?"

"And if you do come from the Hadji, you come to spy. As you say my man did."

The Pathan laughed again.

"Why should the Hadji Saheb need to send a spy, *Huzoor*? Do we not know everything? Did I not tell you at once that but a quarter of your men are fit for duty, that you are on half rations, that you have only a few rounds of ammunition per rifle, and that the British officers are sick, wounded or dead? What need have we for a spy within the walls? We are not fools. We can count, and we can see all that we need to see from without. Also we have tortured your other messengers until they spoke. And they all told the same tale."

"Then since you can take the Fort when you wish, why are you so anxious to persuade me to evacuate it?"

"Because I want to please the Hadji Saheb, my master, who has sent me here for that purpose."

"Again I say he is a humane man," added the Pathan with a grin. "He wishes to save life. The Fort is his for the taking, but he wants it without further cost of life—the lives of his men and yours. . . . Well, there it is, *Huzoor*. Take it or leave it."

And Breckinge knew that he would take it.

Life was dear.

He was not a combatant Officer.

The Fort was bound to fall, and it was his duty to save the lives of the garrison. Clearly it was his duty.

Besides, after all, it was Subedar-Major Ganga Charan who was responsible, surely. He was the senior combatant Officer. Naturally he'd do what Breckinge told him to do; but that wouldn't relieve him of responsibility. So if they did get back to India safely, and a Court of Enquiry awarded blame and punishment for the surrender of the Fort, obviously it was Subedar-Major Ganga Charan who would deserve, and get, the blame and the punishment.

And why should there be any blame?

How many times had it not happened before, that a besieged place had fallen because the Commandant preferred surrender to massacre?

How many times had not a besieged force made honourable capitulation, and marched out with the honours of war, drums beating, flags flying, arms . . . Arms. Yes, what about the rifles? They could not be expected to march from Giltraza to the Khyber without a weapon among them.

Suppose this Hadji fellow kept his word, as he might do, and let them pass through the besiegers and march away, they would fall a prey to the first tribe that chose to attack them, if they were unarmed.

Why, they'd hardly get through the Khyber itself if they had no rifles, much less get from Giltraza to the Khyber.

And of course there was a chance that the Hadji might spare their lives, not only to save unnecessary fighting, but to be able to boast for the rest of his life that a British force had surrendered to him and he had contemptuously let it go.

"And what about the rifles?" he asked suddenly, shooting what he intended to be a penetrating and intimidating glance at the man.

"The rifles, *Huzoor*? Well, I don't know about that. I don't think the Hadji could let the rifles go. No, I'm afraid you'd have to surrender the rifles."

Ah, that was rather reassuring. That certainly looked as though the Pathan leader was making an honest proposition; wanting to get the Fort and the rifles without any further trouble. Now if this *bud-mash* had jumped at the proposal that the garrison should march out under arms, it would have looked very suspicious. If the whole thing was a trick and a trap, he would have agreed to anything. Yes, that he troubled to bargain was very reassuring. Nevertheless, they might as well stay where they were, as set forth to march down through Tribal Territory unarmed.

If they marched out to-morrow and did an average twelve miles a day, the high pass would be open by the time they reached it.

And much good that would do them, if the pass led them down into country where any band of outlaws could make mincemeat of them at long range.

No, they must keep their rifles.

And another point. They must have enough ammunition, too. He wasn't a soldier, but he did know that rifles weren't much good without ammunition, and that they must have enough to put up a fight if they were attacked.

In point of fact, it was extremely improbable that a considerable party of British troops, marching in military formation, would be attacked at all, unless, to their incredulous joy, the brigands and bands of outlaws, not to mention ordinary Tribesmen, saw that they were all unarmed.

"But talk sense, man. Don't speak as one afflicted of Allah and devoid of the understanding of a child. What would it be but another way of killing us, to make us march out from here unarmed? Suppose I trusted your Hadji, and did so. How far should we march before we were fallen upon and slain? Why, a dozen outlaws living in a cave could come down the mountain-side and shoot us all like dogs."

The Pathan shrugged massive shoulders.

"I could not go back to the Hadji Saheb and confess that I had agreed to your taking the rifles," he said glumly.

The two men eyed each other in silence.

"Not all of them," added the Pathan.

A ray of hope, almost of joy, shot through Breckinge's mind.

Not all of them!

"Well, how many, then?" he asked.

"Dead men need no rifles, *Huzoor*," leered the Pathan.

No, of course they didn't. And surely nobody could blame him—or rather Subedar-Major Ganga Charan—

for not attempting to load, with the weight of an extra rifle, men already enfeebled by a siege? Of course not. Surely one would hardly care to ask the strongest troops, in the best of health, to march with two rifles per man?

"And rifles are useless to the sick and the wounded, *Huzoor*," observed the Pathan.

Of course they were. Men who couldn't carry themselves couldn't carry a rifle.

And what about these same sick and wounded?

It would be a sufficiently difficult and dangerous march for those who were neither ill nor wounded. It would be impossible for the rest, and quite obviously out of the question, for those who could march, to burden themselves with the transport of those who could not. He couldn't turn the whole force into stretcher-bearers.

No, the best of them would make but poor progress encumbered with nothing more than their arms, kit and provisions.

Rifles only for those who could march.

Of course. The rifles made a fine bargaining point. He could make great use of what was useless—the remainder. Since they couldn't take all the rifles, they'd buy the necessary with the superfluous, so to speak.

"Look here, *Huzoor*," said the Pathan, "I think perhaps the Hadji Sahab would agree to these terms—that he lets you go free with all those who are fit to march, each man with his rifle, and you leave behind the rifles of the dead and wounded. You open the gates and march away—so many men and so many rifles. The rest are the Hadji's."

"Which means that he gets at least three-quarters of them."

"You cannot take them with you."

"No. But we could take the bolts. Or we could smash them or burn them."

"No, *Huzoor*. The Hadji will not agree to that. He may even be angry with me for allowing you one rifle per man; but that I think I can do because he is offering you your lives, and without your rifles you would lose them."

"And what about ammunition?" asked Breckinge.

"You can take the ammunition of the dead and wounded, up to twenty-five rounds per rifle."

"Twenty-five?" exclaimed Breckinge. "Make it fifty."

"But why, *Huzoor*? It only means extra weight for your men to carry. And who is going to attack a company of sepoys, marching with arms, in military formation, with their scouts and flankers and rear-guards, as the Sirkar's troops always do? Twenty-five rounds is enough, *Huzoor*."

"And what about the sick and wounded whom we leave behind?"

Again the Pathan shrugged his shoulders as he threw out expressive hands, palm upwards.

"They'll have to die," he said.

"What, be put to death, do you mean?"

"What use to keep them, *Huzoor*? What can we do? We have no *hakims* and no doctors' stuff. We have no medicines nor the means of dealing with wounded men. What happens to our own wounded? They live or they die, as Allah wills. And as for enemy wounded . . . Besides, how can we feed useless

mouths—and why should we, if we could—the mouths of our enemies? No, *Huzoor*, the sick and the wounded will have to die.

“But they will die quickly,” he added cheerfully. “They will come to no harm.”

“What do you mean—no harm?”

“I mean the Hadji would not treat them unkindly; would not cut off their hands and feet, or put their heads in the fire. He is not a cruel man. No, do not fear that he would torture them or let them die a lingering death of their wounds and their sickness. They will die at once, as soon as you have marched out.”

“But even without a doctor or medicine or any attention, some might recover,” objected Breckinge.

“None will recover, *Huzoor*,” replied the Pathan curtly.

Then, as Breckinge eyed him, an unpleasant smile spread over his unprepossessing countenance as he observed:

“And it is to be remembered that dead men tell no tales!”

Yes, just what he himself was thinking, damn the fellow’s impudence. Dead men tell no tales, and even if they could, what reproach would their tales be? The sick and wounded would die just as certainly, if dragged out on to the road for that long weary march, as they would if left to enjoy the mercy of that compassionate man the Hadji. As the Romans themselves always said—*Væ victis*.

Somebody had got to suffer; and they themselves who marched out would have plenty of suffering, even if they ever reached safety.

And if they stayed there, they’d all die, anyway.

Of course, it was his duty to save as many as he could ; and obviously the only ones he could save were those who could march.

Yes, the sick and the wounded would have to die.

" I offer you those terms, then, *Huzoor*," repeated the Pathan. " You march out with those who can march, each man carrying a rifle and twenty-five rounds of ammunition."

" And food ? "

" Yes, and food. Each man to take as much as he can carry in his haversack—their parched grain, sugar, cooked *chupatties* and any of that food that the Sirkar issues in tin boxes. But only what can be carried in haversacks.

" And they'll be too weak to carry much," he grinned.

" And how long do you give me to think it over ? " asked Breckinge.

" Until sunrise to-morrow, *Huzoor*. At sunrise, as soon as it is light, I will come to the gate, holding aloft a white cloth, and bringing with me the two sons of our leader ; the beloved sons of the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot himself. They will have the fullest powers to agree to . . ."

" If there's any treachery . . ." interrupted Breckinge.

" Treachery, *Huzoor* ? What need for treachery ? We are a hundred to one, and can take this Fort in ten minutes and put all within it to the sword. Treachery ! "

The man laughed.

" Why, if, in half an hour from now, the Singing Hadji chose to lose a few more men, this place would either be a smoking ruin, occupied only by the dead

and the dying, or a fortress fully manned by the *lashkar* of our leader."

No, reflected Breckinge, there was no need for treachery at sunrise, and the only question was whether they would all be butchered later on, as they marched out. But that was unlikely. If they were to retain their arms and twenty-five rounds of ammunition, there would still be a fight, and many would be slain before the last sepoy died. It was plain that the Singing Hadji felt that he had already lost too many of his *jowans*, and that to lose any more would be to pay too high a price for the Fort, the rifles, the money, accoutrements and other loot. Once again, it was the only chance, and it was a good one.

"So be it," he said, again looking up at the Pathan—it not being his habit to look anyone in the face for long. "So be it. At sunrise to-morrow you come with the Hadji's answer, bringing no more than two men with you, and those two, his own sons, empowered to make final agreement with me. And should there be more than three of you, or the least sign of anything suspicious, we shall open rapid fire—and you three will be the first to die."

"If Allah wills," agreed the Pathan piously. "I go now to tell my master that you will surrender the Fort and march out, provided he allows every man, *who can march*, to go free, bearing his rifle and taking twenty-five rounds of ammunition and such food as he can carry. The force to go unmolested where it will."

Breckinge rose to his feet, picking up the revolver as he did so.

"There's one other thing, *Huzoor*," said the Pathan,

advancing from the corner of the room. "You do command here, do you not? Your words are heard and your *hukm* obeyed? The Native Officers will agree to whatever you say, and do exactly what you direct?"

"Of course I command here. Absolutely," replied Breckinge. "I am the Doctor Sahib, but I hold the rank of Captain and give orders to the Subedar-Major."

"And all other ranks will obey him, *Huzoor*?"

"Of course. Absolutely."

"It is well. I ask because I do not want to receive blame from the Hadji Saheb. If I tell him that I have made an agreement with you, and then it is discovered that you have no powers . . ."

"No powers! Of course I have powers."

"Look, *Huzoor*, you spoke of treachery. Now, I would not use such a word in speaking with the *Huzoor*, but in all business arrangements there may be mistakes, misunderstandings. If, for four hundred rupees, I buy a horse that belongs to two men, both those men must agree to my price, otherwise when I go to pay, one of them may say, '*What is this? Five hundred rupees is the price,*' whereas his partner had agreed to four. And so I have to pay at least four hundred and fifty and . . ."

"Peace. What's all this talk of horses and partners?" interrupted Breckinge. "I command here, and I have spoken."

"*Huzoor*, I am but an ignorant man and do not know the customs of the Sirkar's army. You are both *hakim* and officer Sahib, and yet not really a *jangi nafar*, a man of war. When the Hadji Saheb questions me, he will be angry if I bring not a word of the chief *jangi nafar*, and it is not well to anger the Singing Hadji

of Sufed Kot. Let me, therefore, have the word of the Subedar-Major Saheb that he will do as the *Huzoor* bids; and order his men to march out of the Fort."

"I tell you that he will," snapped Breckinge.

"Then let me hear him say so, *Huzoor*. For my master is a hard man; and I fear lest, making a mistake, I offend him."

Without turning his back to the Pathan, Breckinge went to the door, opened it, and called to the sentry standing a few paces from the door.

"*Subedar-Major Saheb ko salaam do*," he snapped.

Saluting and hurrying off, the sentry returned, a minute later, with the Subedar-Major.

Subedar-Major Ganga Charan understood English perfectly and spoke it intelligibly, two accomplishments which he was wont carefully to conceal, but of which Breckinge was well aware."

"Look here, Ganga," said the latter quietly. "This fellow is quite *pukka*. They sent him to offer terms. I have had to agree to them. We march out with rifles and ammunition, and they march in and take the Fort. They could do that in any case, so it is only a matter of saving more bloodshed. And there's another big force coming to join them in a few days, the Mehtar of Lohistan and Halzit and the Powindah Mullah. We simply cannot hold the place if they assault again, especially with three times the number."

"No, Sahib, we cannot," replied the Subedar-Major.

"There's plenty of ammunition, but it is a case of numbers. And the men are tired. And even if, when they are reinforced, the enemy do not assault, they can starve us out. Yes, of course. We haven't a chance, and they can do what they like with us;

starve us out or butcher us. It's a damn shame." Breckinge's voice rose.

"We've got to look after ourselves," he cried, almost hysterically.

"What about the sick and the wounded?" asked the Subedar-Major.

"Well, the longer we are here, the more sick and wounded there'll be. Until we are *all* sick or wounded, starving and dying. And then they'll come and hack us to pieces. It's our duty to save those whom we can save, those who can march," was the reply.

The Subedar-Major eyed Breckinge speculatively. How different was this dark-skinned half-caste from the Major Sahib whose last words to him had been:

"We'll beat them, Subedar-Major. We'll beat them yet. We'll hold this Fort as long as we can hold a rifle."

Yes, a very different man . . . But life was dear and pension near.

"Who'll give the order, Sahib?" he asked. "Who'll be responsible for the surrender?"

The old, old question of the Indian to the-European; the old, old necessity—a *hukm*, an order; the old, old fear, bugbear and stumbling-block—*Responsibility*.

Give me an order, begs the faithful Indian subordinate of the European master, and faithfully I will carry it out. Make any demands, give me any commands, give me any punishment, but do not give me responsibility.

"Who will give the order?" he repeated.

"You will give the men their orders, of course," replied Breckinge. "You will give the command to open the gates and march out, naturally."

"If we are allowed to go, and we get safely back to

India, you will take the blame for . . ." began the Subedar-Major.

"The blame?" snarled Breckinge.

"The responsibility, Sahib. It is you who tell me what is to be done, and I who see that the men do it."

"Yes, yes," replied Breckinge. "I will tell you that it is our duty, to save the lives of the garrison. All will surely die unless . . ."

"Then it is your order to me, Sahib?"

"Yes, yes, all right. That will be all right," Breckinge reassured the Native Officer.

Yes, of course it would. If they lived to face an enquiry—and better live to do that than be butchered here—the senior combatant Officer would of course be responsible. The fact that he was a Native Officer had nothing to do with it. He himself was only the Doctor, and was in no way answerable for what the 'competent local military authority' did. The Subedar-Major was the competent local military authority, of course. It was the Doctor's business to look after the health of the men, to go where they went, and do everything he could for their physical welfare.

He would testify that Subedar-Major Ganga Charan gave orders for evacuating the Fort; that he himself, while refraining from urging his views either way, realized that it was a terrible decision to have to make, but that the decision having been made, all that he himself could do, was to continue in his duty as Medical Officer attached to the unit.

Another thought entered his mind as he studied the face of the Subedar-Major; a memory of a good omen. Dr. Brydon. He accompanied the retreating garrison

from Kabul on its march to Peshawar through the Khyber Pass, and was the sole survivor of that massacre. What a wonderful thing if Alexander Breckinge should be the sole survivor of this garrison, and should ride alone into Landi Kotal as Brydon rode alone into Jellalabad, the only man who escaped, the only man who could tell them what had happened.

Anyhow, his evidence as to what had happened would be accepted, of course ; and it would be merely of academic interest, so to speak, inasmuch as he was not concerned in any way with the military aspect of the matter.

And somewhat similar thoughts passed through the mind of the Subedar-Major.

After all, it was not as though he could be held responsible. He could say—and the Subedar and two Jemadars would of course support him—that the order to evacuate the Fort was given by the Captain Sahib, who was a doctor, of course, but who was a Sahib, or ranked as one, and who was a *pukka* Captain, and of a rank far, far higher than that of Subedar-Major.

And if a Court-Martial pointed out that, as Captain Breckinge was not a combatant Officer, responsibility fell upon Subedar-Major Ganga Charan, which surely would be most unjust, and was most unlikely, he could still say with perfect truth—as it happened—and with the full support of his subordinate officers, that the Doctor Sahib had said that they must go, or they would all die of sickness and starvation ; that he gave an order to that effect ; and that as he was a Captain Sahib, the Subedar-Major had no choice but to obey him.

How fortunate it was that the Major Sahib was dead. He would never have agreed to this. Rather would he

have shot any man, with his own hand, who so much as talked of surrender.

Yes, he'd have held on until they were all dead of the bad belly-sickness, of starvation, or of wounds—except the few who survived to be hacked to pieces by these devils of Pathans when they burst in.

Only a fool trusted a Pathan, but there was a chance, since they were to be allowed to keep their rifles. And there was a good chance, a very good chance, yea, far more than a chance, a certainty, that the Captain Sahib would be held responsible.

And if the Captain Sahib never survived to reach India, Subedar-Major Ganga Charan could say that it was by Major Denbrough Sahib's orders that he marched the survivors out of the Fort. Yes, just before he died, the Major Sahib agreed to surrender the Fort, to save the lives of the few who had defended it for so long.

"Very good, Sahib," he said. "I'll give the necessary orders. When do we march?"

"To-morrow, if the Hadji agrees to my terms that all who can carry a rifle do so, and that we take twenty-five rounds of ammunition and what rations we can carry. This man's coming back at sunrise with the answer, but he is quite sure his master will agree. Better order the *Stand-to* before dawn."

"Don't trust them, Sahib."

"No. He's bringing only two others with him—the Hadji's two sons—to bring their father's answer."

"Why should the Hadji make any terms with us at all, since nothing can prevent his taking the Fort?"

"So that he can get it without any further fighting. He has lost too many men already."

"Why should he not fall upon us and slay us when we have marched out?"

"Because we shall march out with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets. And still he would lose men if there were a fight."

"Why should he not continue the siege until we die of starvation?"

"Because his rival and enemy, the Mehtar of Lohistan and Halzit and the Powindah Mullah are on their way here, and he means to have the Fort before they come.

"*'The faith of a Pathan, the mercy of a wolf,'*" quoted the Subedar-Major sententiously.

"Yes, I know, I know. But . . ."

"*'Trust a Hur, an Afghan, a woman, a panther, a snake—and a Pathan,'*" again quoted the Subedar-Major.

"Yes, I know. And don't suppose I'm going to trust them because it amuses me. It's our one chance to save our lives."

Silence fell in the little mud-walled room as the Pathan watched the two men who were talking in English.

"I'll give the necessary orders, Sahib," said the Subedar-Major at length.

"Yes, tell the Jemadars and Havildars to-night, and let them tell the men. I'll have a talk with Subedar Gopal Mangal myself."

"I'll see to all things, Sahib. Ammunition and rations. Twenty-five rounds—and as much more as can be concealed. And cooked rations as well as . . ."

"Yes, let each man carry two haversacks. I don't suppose they'd say anything. Try, anyhow."

"I'll see to everything, Sahib."

"Right. Now, blindfold this man again, and turn him out."

The bandage having been removed from his eyes ere he was thrust out through the briefly-opened gates, the Pathan, his hands raised above his shoulders, as though deprecating treachery and a consequent shot in the back, hurried along the track leading from the Fort, dropped into the trench from which a steady fire had been for so long maintained upon the gate-tower, and crawled to cover behind *sangars* which flanked the trench.

Arrived at dead ground in the shelter of big boulders, he rose to his feet, made his way to the bivouac of the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot, and begged that His Holiness, if not asleep within his cave, might be informed of his return.

The scowling, truculent and extremely dirty member of the Hadji's special retinue and bodyguard to whom he gave the message, replied that the Hadji Saheb was not only very much awake but awaiting his return.

"Well, give me back my rifle and belt and take me along to him," said the Pathan messenger who had called himself Ghulam Hyder.

No Pathan cares to be separated longer than is absolutely necessary from his rifle, which is to him what his spectacles are to a short-sighted man.

"What have you done with it?"

The man grinned.

"See the Hadji Saheb first," he said, and led the way to the big hill-side cave, at the mouth of which the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot held *jirgah*.

"*Salaam aleikum*, Hadji Saheb," said the messenger, raising his hands to his forehead in salute, as he approached.

"Well?" growled the Hadji, ignoring the salutation.

"*Tobah!* The accursed unbelievers are still stiff-necked and defiant, Allah smite them. They refused thy terms with laughter, Hadji Saheb."

Frowning, the Hadji, a fighting priest of most secular habit and appearance, stroked his beard.

"Have they ammunition?"

"Unlimited. They have not yet begun to think of touching the reserve supply, of which alone there is enough to withstand a siege."

"Food?"

"Ample. Of that again the reserve is untouched. A go-down full of sacks of grain, sugar, salt, flour; all things. They have even *ghee* and *turmeric*."

"Then what of the messenger who came hither offering to make terms?"

"A trick, Hadji Saheb. A clever *banao*. If the man is caught by your Holiness, he tells that tale. If not, he goes on and carries a message to the nearest Angrezi fort or telegraph or relief, that all is well, and that if they hurry up there will still be time to catch you."

"Who commands there? A *hakim*, as the messengers said?"

"No. More trickery. A Sahib. A *bahadur* and experienced man of war."

"What is their strength?"

"They have lost but few, and there is no sickness, owing to the skill of the *hakim*."

"There is a *hakim*, then?"

"Yes, verily, the messengers spoke that much truth. A very *hushyar hakim*. He has kept sickness from them and quickly healed their wounds."

The Hadji eyed the messenger long and thoughtfully, with narrowed eyes and pursed lips.

"Then why so few at the loop-holes and on the walls?"

"More cunning and trickery. Only one-half are ever on duty, the other half resting, sleeping, eating."

"How many?" asked the Hadji.

"I could not count, Hadji Saheb. I did not see much, as I was led from the gate to the Colonel Sahib's room. But, being prepared for a sudden rush, there was a man at every loop-hole, a man at every embrasure round the walls, and a reserve of men waiting ready in the courtyard."

"You seemed to have learned a lot, nevertheless."

"The Sahib hid nothing. He was willing, nay desirous, that the Hadji Saheb should know the strength of the place."

"Why have we seen no *topis* among the *puggris*? Why has the fire from the walls been weak, as though there were but few rifles, and ammunition scarce?"

"Cunning, I say, Hadji Saheb. To lead you to make an assault. The Colonel Sahib wants your *lashkar* to come out in the open, that the garrison may rush to the walls and open rapid fire and mow your men down."

Still eyeing his man, the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot continued to stroke his beard, in anxious thought and some perplexity.

"So we are tricked, are we? Fooled by these Infidel sons of noseless mothers. Allah blacken their faces on earth and burn their souls in Hell. They

let you in, let you sniff around their Fort like a pariah dog round a courtyard, and then kicked you out again like the dog you are—and laughed. They would laugh at me, would they ? ”

The messenger raised deprecating hands at this shocking thought.

“ Laughter is not the attribute of the wise, Hadji Saheb,” said he meaningly

The Hadji looked at the messenger. This man had interested, and slightly intrigued, him from the first ; a man of parts, with a brain under his lousy turban.

“ Eh ? ”

“ It is the sound emitted by fools, as is braying by asses,” continued the man, “ but as I passed through the gates of their Fort, I smiled.”

The Hadji looked yet more interested as he waited for more.

“ For to-morrow I return taking two others with me.”

“ Why ? ”

“ In fulfilment of the tale I told their Colonel Sahib, that to-morrow I would come back with the two sons of the Hadji Saheb to make a treaty with him, whereby *the Hadji Saheb will raise the siege and depart*, in return for a gift of fifty rifles with a hundred rounds of ammunition for each, and all the rupees that are in the Treasury of the Fort.”

“ What is this ? Say that again,” requested the Hadji.

“ Having seen all I could, and received a contemptuous reply to the offer of safe-conduct if they would surrender, I thought of a plan. Knowing that the Colonel Sahib would not give up the rifles, nor the money, I made him think that if my mission

failed, as I must know it would, I would try to make him think that the Hadji Saheb was tired of breaking his teeth upon a rock, and was about to depart. And being about to depart, was trying to get what he could. Anything he could.

“ ‘How do I know the Hadji Saheb would keep his word?’ asked the Colonel. ‘Who would trust a Pathan? And how do I know that you are empowered to make this offer?’ ”

“ ‘Look Sahib,’ said I, ‘if I return to-morrow with the Hadji Saheb’s own sons—the light of his eyes, the pride of all his days, the joy of his life, who will be the support of his old age—will you make agreement with them? The Hadji Saheb will keep faith. If he will trust his two sons to you, knowing that you will not slay them or even seize them and bind them, will you not, in like manner, trust him?’ ”

“ And after thinking for a moment the Colonel Sahib, smiling, said :

“ ‘Bring them to-morrow at sunrise.’ ”

The messenger smiled ingratiatingly.

“ Well? ” growled the Hadji, who was not amused.

“ Then to-morrow at sunrise I again present myself at the gate, taking two with me—and there will be three of us inside the Fort. And who knows what three bold and resolute men may not be able to do? ”

The Hadji started up.

“ Ghazi! Ghazi! ” he cried. “ You will? You will slay the Sahib, run amok, kill the *hakim*, kill the Native Officers, give your lives—and gain Paradise? Oh, thrice blessed are they who gain Paradise in the dawning. Seven times blessed are they who do so with the blood of the Infidel upon their hands.”

"We are *ghazis*. We would acquire merit and attain Paradise," admitted the messenger. "We would have a treble *ziarat*, for ever to be known as the place of holiest pilgrimage, the Tomb of the Three Pirs who died for the Faith."

"Unless your courage fail you at the last moment and . . ."

"Nay, nay, Hadji Saheb," expostulated the candidate for martyrdom and Paradise.

"Well, in any case—to hold them in converse, yea, and to get them altogether in assembly, all officers, that you may rush upon them and slay and spare not—make play with thy tale of a bargain. Give them to think that I am weary and would raise the siege, but that I hope to go not empty-handed away."

Smiling, the messenger bowed his head.

The Hadji re-seated himself upon his heels as the light of enthusiasm died from his eyes.

This wasn't good enough. Or, rather, it was too good. Too good to be true. If this man was a genuine fanatical *ghazi*, the Hadji was the more mistaken.

On the other hand, what had he to gain by trickery? His shrift would be short inside that Fort if anything went wrong; and the best he could hope for would be to be slung out with a heavy boot behind him, to return to his friends like a beaten cur with its tail between its legs. The worst—to be hanged from the walls.

And what about treachery to himself, the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot?

No, what could the fellow hope to gain by going over to the British? Apart from the fact that they would not want him, would not have him at any

price. They were much too wily; and besides, it wasn't their way.

Still, it looked as though there was nothing to lose, and that there might be everything to gain by agreeing to the scheme.

What about a rush at the gate as it was held open for the three of them to walk in? A picked score or two of his best men silently assembled in the darkness before dawn, each bearing a dead thorn-bush and lying flat, and still as the dead, behind stones and boulders. Let the three men hail the gate just at dawn, and, as it was opened, let this Ghulam Hyder and the other two—if he could find two to go with him—keep the gate open while the rest sprang up and rushed it. Then a prompt fusillade at the walls and a general assault while the chosen men fought their way in.

It might be done at not too great a cost.

Better still, if the three could get in and go *ghazi* inside. The sepoy people would almost certainly surrender if they had neither Sahibs nor Native Officers, no leader at all. And if they did not, their defence would be but poor and half-hearted.

Yes, it really looked like a case of nothing to lose and everything to gain. A bargain after the Hadji's own heart.

"And two other *bahadurs* would go in with you?" he asked Ghulam Hyder.

"They have agreed, willingly. They yearn to gain remission of their sins."

"Doubtless their sins are many," smiled the Hadji, and again pondered the matter as his fingers scrabbled in his bushy beard.

No, he could see nothing wrong, see no opportunity

or reason for treachery. The Pathan proverb, '*The friend of a friend is a friend, and the friend of an enemy is an enemy*,' applied here; and this man's gang had joined him well-recommended. Men of his own knew that one of them was the son of a Khan and married to the daughter of a Chief whom they themselves had known.

No, undoubtedly the gang had come and joined the fight for the love of a fight and in hatred of the intruding Unbeliever. And now they desired to gain fame on earth and *houris* in Heaven. Far be it from him to hinder them. Especially as the place might be taken without assault, almost without further cost.

And already the cost had been high. Far too high, in point of fact, and he had reached that anxious and difficult point at which it was debateable as to whether it would be wiser to cut his losses or to endeavour to turn them to profits in a final effort.

Undoubtedly his prestige was suffering, and though his statement—that the bullets of the Infidel turned to water as they approached his sacred person—was not disproven, it was painfully evident that they did not do so when they approached the persons of his followers.

And though he had preached *jehad*, and his *jowans* knew that to fall in a Holy War was to go straight to Paradise, there was a deplorable number of them who appeared to prefer to enjoy the pleasures of this earth for yet a little longer.

If he raised the siege, abandoned the place and departed, his fame would suffer eclipse, his prestige be grievously lessened. Perhaps be destroyed, yea and himself with it.

And another unsuccessful assault could mean nothing less than the defeat of all his plans, the failure of his campaign, the extinguishing of the torch that was to set the whole Border alight.

Should he fail now, what hope that the Amir would send his best General and an army of *khassadars* to join him? What hope that the Mahsuds, Afridis, Mohmands and the Shinwaris would flock to his banner?

No, it would be the end of his great dream of leading, beneath the famous green banner of the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot, a vast army that would sweep down the Khyber, overwhelming the Forts of the Infidel, occupy and loot Peshawar, cross the Indus, and come down upon the plains of Hindustan like locusts upon a field of *jowari*.

At first all had promised well. The Amir had sent an evasive and ambiguous reply that, like a nut of unattractive exterior contained a sweet kernel of nourishment.

'Unto him that hath much, I will add more. Unto him that needeth not help, I will give my aid without stint, and will see to it that success shall further succeed. But from him who hath not, I will take away, and for him who faileth, I will increase failure.'

Yea, a blow is as good as a kick to a blind donkey.

And at first, all had indeed promised well. Parties, large and small, of Tribesmen, had joined him from all directions: and gangs such as this would-be *ghazi* and his friends. Messages of goodwill had come from far Herat, Jellalabad, Kandahar and every Province and Governorship of Afghanistan. Messages --and promises. And from beyond Penjdeh had come more. Not only messages of goodwill and promises,

but good minted money and European rifles, a convoy led by a curious and interesting man who spoke excellent Pushtu, Hindustani, Russian and English, a most encouraging and useful man, whose advice had been invaluable until he disappeared.

Yes, all had promised exceeding well at first ; and the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot had conceived himself to be the great boulder that starts the avalanche which sweeps all before it and overwhelms the valley.

And here this Fort was delaying his plan, frustrating his ambition and threatening to ruin it.

Either the Fort, or the Hadji's soaring schemes must fall.

" So be it," said he, slowly nodding his head, as he considered the messenger. " At dawn to-morrow. And I will have a party of other devotees ready to rush the gate."

The messenger smiled and sadly shook his head.

" No, Hadji Saheb, the whole plan will fall to the ground if there is the slightest suspicion. They will not open the gates until the sun is up and daylight full. They are wily and watchful men. Instead of opening the gate, they will open fire, if they be in the least suspicious, and our plan will miscarry. Let all be as it was this morning ; and make no assault until there be a signal. The firing of a shot, shouts and commotion ; or one of us running to the wall, waving a cloth and crying aloud."

" Where were you brought face to face with the Sahib ? " asked the Hadji.

" In his room, an inner chamber."

" And who were present ? "

" He and the other Sahibs, the Kaptan and Liftenant

Sahibs and the Doctor Sahib and the Indian Officers of the *pultan*."

"Then, if suddenly going *ghazi*, you three fall upon them, and there is a slaughter, how shall I know of it?"

"There will be outcry and men will come running. There will be loud *bumbuljo* and *hulagula*."

"And if there were not? If there were silence all about the walls?"

"It will still be plain that we have succeeded, inasmuch as we shall not return. The fact that we come not out again will be proof that we have not acted as peaceful messengers, and have been slain for our treachery. It is well known that the Sahibs would never seize and imprison envoys coming in good faith?"

Again the Hadji slowly nodded his head.

"It is true. And if, suspecting you, they search you for weapons and, having taken them from you, parley with you while rifles are levelled at your breasts, what then?"

"Then, Hadji Saheb, we can do nothing with our hands and our weapons, but can do much with our tongues and our cunning. We will again offer to raise the siege in return for rifles and money, and artfully make it clear to the Sahib that the siege is to be raised and the Hadji Saheb about to depart."

"And then?"

"And then, returning, I will make full report to the Hadji Saheb.

"And the Hadji will raise the siege and depart—a little way," he added. "And suddenly, when they have become bold, and thankfully take their ease, he will reappear in the middle of the night, silently as a wolf. And like a wolf will he make his spring."

The reply of the Hadji was an expansive smile, a fat chuckle, and something very closely resembling a heavy wink.

He must keep an eye on this fellow. Undoubtedly he was a *jangi nafar* ; certainly he was something of a *ustad*, and clearly he was a wily counsellor. He must have him about his person, promote him, and use him to the uttermost.

But he was forgetting. The man was *ghazi*, was going to sacrifice his body for the good of his soul, was going to step straight to Paradise over the corpse of an Infidel. A pity in a way, but a good bargain.

Yes, the Hadji was more than willing to exchange the life of the excellent Ghulam Hyder for that of the Commandant of Giltraza Fort. Indeed, the three of them, with luck and judgment, cunning and courage, might make a clean sweep of the lot, Sahibs and Indian Officers, too.

Yes, a grand bargain. Three strangers, no kith or kin of his, in exchange for Giltraza Fort and all that it contained ; a resounding victory over the Infidel ; and a tremendous impetus to the avalanche that should sweep him, like so many of his forerunners, from the hills of the Border, adown the valley of the Indus, and on to the gates of Delhi itself.

Dili dur ast. . . .

But many a conqueror had reached it by the road that the Hadji and his vast conglomerate army should begin to tread, as soon as this Fort had fallen and the flames of its burning lit the Border from end to end, and cast their bright glow upon the palace of the Amir in Kabul itself.

CHAPTER III

AFTER an endless-seeming sleepless night of acutest anxiety, doubt and fear, Captain Alexander Breckinge betook him before dawn to the loop-holed guard-house beside the gate. Through a narrow iron-shuttered loop-hole he peered out into the paling darkness.

Would this Ghulam Hyder return, bringing with him the two sons of the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot? Would they be fully authorized to make agreement for the surrender of the Fort in return for the lives of the able-bodied, and would they allow them to march out with rifles, ammunition and food?

Should he at the last moment refuse the terms, seize the Pathan leader's sons and hold them as hostages, threatening to hang them the moment a shot was fired against the Fort?

And of what avail would that be, if he did so, and no shot were fired, but the siege were continued until they all died of starvation, or at any rate had no longer the strength to man the walls? The leader's sons would outlast them easily, since the garrison was already in a semi-starving condition, whereas the two sons would enter the place well-fed and in most robust health and strength.

No, it wouldn't do. Besides, what hideous reprisals the Hadji would exact when he took the Fort, as eventually he must.

Calling to a sepoy, he bade him ask the Subedar-Major Saheb to come to the guard-room.

"Salaam Sahib," said that officer, as he entered the room. "The sun will be up in a few minutes."

"Do you think there may be a dawn attack?" asked Breckinge.

"No, I don't. They know we should be ready for them, and they'd lose a lot of men in the first few minutes if we gave them five rounds rapid, as they rushed from their position. No, I think our only danger is treachery when we open the gates and march out."

"But even then," he added, "there would be a lot of killing, as they are leaving us our rifles and bayonets."

"They don't like bayonets," observed Breckinge. "And I think it's a very good sign that they bargained for the spare rifles and did not pretend to agree to everything I said."

"Oh, no, we shall be all right," he continued, more to encourage himself than his hearer. "Do the men know?"

"Yes, Sahib. I talked to the Native Officers and non-commissioned Officers and told them you were certain it was our one possible chance, the only way to save our lives, pointing out that the Fort must fall, in any case, and we be slain, to a man, unless we did this thing."

"And all agreed with you?"

"All save that *takrari* fellow, Havildar Umrao Singh. He tried to show what a *bahadur* he is, and said he'd sooner lose his life."

"What did you say to that?"

"I told him he was quite welcome. If he chose to

disobey orders in time of war, and to be hacked to pieces by the Pathans, he could do so. Just as well that as be Court-Martialled and shot for mutiny and inciting to mutiny."

"How—inciting?"

"He said there were men in his Section who'd say the same, and do what he did—refuse to surrender and to march out. Said they'd shut themselves up in the gate-tower and fight to the last cartridge."

"Fight? The fools! The Pathans would burn them alive in the tower."

"That's what I told him, and he said that they . . ."

"Look, look," interrupted Breckinge, who had been peering through the loop-hole as he talked. "Here they come, three of them!"

The sun had risen with the same amazing swiftness as that with which it sets; and, in the light of its bright rays three Pathans were seen to leave the cover of the rocks and boulders that lay beyond the nearest sangars and advance with raised hands, the leading one waving aloft a white cloth.

"You are keeping a sharp look-out for treachery?" said Breckinge.

"*Han*, Sahib, *bé-shak*. One blast of my whistle and they'll get 'rapid independent' from every man who can fire a rifle."

The men advanced and halted at the loud challenge of the sentry above the gate.

As they did so, the three raised their hands yet higher, turned about and presented their broad *posh-teen*-clad backs to the Fort, waited in that position for a minute, turned about again, and continued their slow march towards the gate.

"Be careful, be careful, Subedar-Major," urged Breckinge, toying nervously with the flap of the revolver-holster which he had buckled on, ere leaving his room.

"Have no fear, Sahib," was the reply. "The gate will be opened but a couple of feet and for a couple of seconds. They will be shot instantly, if there is the slightest attempt to open it further or to cause delay."

"Bring them to my room," said Breckinge, "and keep strictest watch and look-out while they are with me. Blindfold them, of course, and search them for weapons, and station four men with loaded rifles outside my door."

§ 2

As on the previous day, Breckinge seated himself at the table in the ill-lit cell that was his room, placed his loaded revolver in front of him, and waited.

Was it safe to interview them alone? He had six shots in the revolver; but there were three of them, and these Pathans were terrible men. Quite probably a revolver-bullet would not stop one unless it took him through the heart or the brain. If they made a simultaneous rush at him, he wouldn't have a chance, even though they were unarmed.

Perhaps he had better have a sepoy. Yes, two sepoys, with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets, standing behind his chair. Probably there was no real danger, but it was as well to be on the safe side. One couldn't be too careful in dealing with these treacherous swine.

The door opened and the Subedar-Major entered,

followed by Breckinge's visitor of yesterday, Ghulam Hyder, two other Pathans, and four sepoy.

Directing the Subedar-Major to place the three Pathans on the opposite side of the room and to remove the bandages from their eyes. Breckinge bade him station two of the sepoy behind his chair with loaded rifles at the 'ready,' and orders to shoot instantly, if any of the three moved a step in his direction. The other two sentries were to wait without, and were to rush in, the moment they heard a shout or a shot.

Matters having been arranged to his satisfaction, Breckinge, revolver in hand, studied the two newcomers.

Both were big and burly men.

One, of the ordinary fair Pathan type ; the other, darker.

All three looked to Breckinge as though they might well have served in a Pathan or Baluchi regiment of the British Army, a remarkably truculent, forbidding and sinister-looking trio.

To think of hundreds and hundreds of such men, swarming over the walls, each with a terrible Khyber knife in his hand, the weapon with which the Pathan loves to fight at close quarters.

Khyber 'knife' ! The thing was as big and heavy as a sword ; and used like a sword, to cut and hack and slash, as a Gurkha uses his *kukri* or a jungle man his *machête*. Absurd to call them knives. They weren't much used for stabbing, those dreadful blades, a yard long, two inches across, half an inch thick at the back, razor-edged and needle-pointed.

Again Breckinge's over-vivid imagination caused him to shudder, at a picture of hands, feet, arms, heads,

being lopped off, each with a single flail-like swishing blow of one of those dreadful weapons.

"Salaam, *Huzoor*," said the Pathan calling himself Ghulam Hyder.

"Are these two the sons of the Hadji?" replied Breckinge.

"*Han*, Sahib, *bé-shak*. Amanullah Khan and Allahdad Khan."

"They don't look to me like brothers," growled Breckinge.

"Different mothers," observed Ghulam Hyder, grinning.

"And they've come to confirm the Hadji's acceptance of my terms, eh?"

"They have, *Huzoor*. In his great mercy, the Hadji Saheb agrees that you may march away with your men, unmolested, each bearing rifle and bayonet, twenty-five rounds of ammunition, and what rations he can carry. All else, including the rifles of the sick and wounded and dead, and the spare ones in the armoury, to be left behind; all money, clothing, accoutrements, stores. Everything. It is agreed, *Huzoor*?"

"It is agreed."

"And are all the Native Officers willing and obedient? And all the men, too?"

"One non-commissioned Officer refuses, and says that a few of the men of his Section, relations doubtless, will not obey the order."

"Perhaps, being dishonest men, they distrust the word of the Hadji," smiled Ghulam Hyder.

"Perhaps. But I am told that the man says he would rather die than take part in the surrender.

"Let him die," he added.

"With those who support him and the sick and wounded," said Ghulam Hyder. "When will you be ready to open the gates and march out? To-day?"

"To-day."

"It would be better that all who can do so, should march out before the Hadji's men enter," suggested Ghulam Hyder significantly.

"Yes. We shall march out with fixed bayonets and loaded rifles, prepared to fight to the last, if necessary," said Breckinge, looking as fierce and dangerous as he could. "In the event of treachery we shall sell our lives dearly."

"The Hadji Saheb wishes to prevent bloodshed," was the reply.

"It is agreed, then," continued Ghulam Hyder. "But it is the Hadji's wish that all Officers and Native Officers swear in the presence of these, his sons, that they will obey the *Huzoor*, will do as he orders, and will—give no trouble."

"You can take my word for that," replied Breckinge curtly.

"No, that I cannot do, *Huzoor*. I must return with the Hadji's sons, and they must assure their father that all have made surrender, in their presence—or been dealt with."

"And the Havildar and his men who will not do so?" asked Breckinge.

"That little difficulty can be dealt with, *Huzoor* . . . They will be dealt with."

With a word of warning to his two supporters to be watchful and ready, Breckinge went to the door and bade one of the sentries, waiting without, to request the Subedar-Major Saheb to come to him.

"It seems that this Hadji fellow wishes his two sons to receive your surrender personally," he said in English, when the Subedar-Major arrived. "Your own and that of your officers."

"Mine, Sahib? I? I am not making the surrender," objected the Subedar-Major.

"Well, we can't split hairs now, man. What does it matter, so long as they let us go? Anyway, they want to be quite sure that you and the other Native Officers are agreed about it. I want you to tell them, and then to send Subedar Gopal Mangal and Jemadar Rama Narayen and after them the Havildars."

"Tell them in Hindustani," he added, turning to the three Pathans, "that you surrender."

And facing the three grim men, standing side by side along the wall, Subedar-Major Ganga Charan said, in Hindustani:

"It is the Captain Sahib's order; and I obey. I and the Native Officers and sepoy under my command surrender as the Captain Sahib says. We will march out with our rifles and twenty-five rounds of ammunition for each man, without fighting—unless we are attacked."

Breckinge said nothing.

"Do you understand that?" asked Ghulam Hyder of the fairer of his companions, in Pushtu.

"I do," replied that man in the same language. "He says that by the Captain Sahib's orders he surrenders and will march out without fighting, unless attacked."

"Tell him you understand," said Ghulam Hyder to the Pathan.

And in good Hindustani the man addressed himself to the Subedar-Major.

"I hear your words," said he. "It is well. You surrender and will not fight. *Achcha*."

"And you?" asked Ghulam Hyder in Pushtu, turning to the darker of his two companions.

"*Han*," grunted the man. "I understand," and addressing the Subedar-Major, used much the same form of words as the other Pathan had done.

"It is well, *Huzoor*," said Ghulam Hyder. "This man may go. Bid him send the other Native Officers."

"All right, Subedar-Major Sahib," said Breckinge. "Send in Subedar Gopal Mangal . . . You will keep a sharp look-out, won't you?"

A minute or two later the Native Officer, brother-in-law and second in rank to the Subedar-Major, entered, and him Ghulam Hyder immediately addressed in Hindustani.

"Are you willing to surrender," he asked, "and to go out from here, promising that the men under your command will not fight my people unless they are attacked?"

"It is an order," replied the man. "I obey it."

"Whose order?" asked Ghulam Hyder.

"The Captain Sahib's."

"If the Captain Sahib and the Subedar-Major Sahib gave you different orders, which of them would you obey?"

"The Captain Sahib," replied the man.

"Let this man go, and send in the next," directed Ghulam Hyder.

"Are you giving orders here?" asked Breckinge. "The Fort isn't surrendered yet, you know."

Ghulam Hyder smiled, and murmured the usual formula.

"It is as your Honour pleases."

"All right, Subedar-Saheb. Send Jemadar Rama Narayen," directed Breckinge.

Jemadar Rama Narayen, the Subedar-Major's relative, also stated his intention of obeying the orders of his superior officer.

"Which officer?" enquired Ghulam Hyder.

"The Captain Sahib," replied the Jemadar with a glance at Breckinge, who made no comment.

As the men turned to depart:

"*Subbr karo*," ordered Ghulam Hyder, and enquired whether there were any other Native Officers.

"Only those three on duty," replied Breckinge.

"The rest are sick, wounded, or dead."

"And clearly these three will obey your orders, *Huzoor*," smiled Ghulam Hyder.

"Without doubt," agreed Breckinge.

"And now the lesser people, the Havildars and Naiks and such."

"Why waste time? You don't want to see them all, do you? They'll do as they are ordered, all except the one I told you about."

"We wish to see them all," replied Ghulam Hyder.

"It is the Hadji's order to us."

"Is it not so?" he added, turning to his companions.

"It is our father's order," replied the darker one.

"And it must be done," added the other. "All, in any authority, must surrender to us personally."

"Send the Havildars in, one by one, then," Breckinge bade the Jemadar, who, saluting, departed, looking less dejected than when he entered.

Two Havildars, looking emaciated, weary, and as sick as only a sick Indian can look, gave prompt assurance that they would certainly obey orders, and could undertake that the men under their command would do that too.

The third Havildar appeared to be of different mettle.

"Now then, you," Breckinge addressed him in Hindustani. "It has become necessary to surrender this Fort and save such lives as can be saved. The Subedar-Major Sahib tells me that you were disobedient, insolent, and mutinous when he spoke to the Officers and non-commissioned officers yesterday and told them what it was their duty to do. Well, you know the punishment for such conduct. I have sent for you to say that, in the circumstances, I will overlook it, if you return immediately to duty, and set your men an example of prompt and cheerful obedience to the orders of your Commanding Officer—the Subedar-Major Sahib. What have you to say?"

"Sahib, I will not surrender," replied the man instantly.

"Then you will surely die."

"Sahib, my face will thus not be blackened. I am not *bé-ittibar*."

"And are your Officers? Is not their *izzat* as . . . ?"

"Sahib, I will not surrender," interrupted the man, standing erectly to attention, and looking Breckinge squarely in the face.

"Nor will the men of my Section," he added.

"How many of thy men will refuse to surrender?" asked Ghulam Hyder.

The Havildar ignored him.

"Answer the question," ordered Breckinge.

"I heard no question, Sahib," replied the man.

"Then hear mine, *béwakuf*. How many other fools wish to die with you?"

"There are seven brave men who . . ."

"Let me have no insolence from you," cried Breckinge. "You are a mutineer. I have the right to shoot you where you stand and . . ."

"Shoot, Sahib," replied the man with gross insolence or high courage, according to the point of view.

"Have the men disarmed and brought here, *Hazoor*," said Ghulam Hyder in the manner of one who gives an order that he knows will be obeyed.

"How do I know it is not a trick?" replied Breckinge. "No men shall be disarmed and brought from the walls and loop-holes until this matter is settled."

Ghulam Hyder shrugged his shoulders.

"Let this man go and get their names, then," he said; and Breckinge ordered the Havildar to go and do so.

"Without doubt you command here," smiled Ghulam Hyder as the Havildar departed.

"Of course I do."

"Send those two sentries away, then."

"Why?"

"Why not? Allah! You have a revolver and we are unarmed, and you will have four of them outside the door ready to enter if you call.

"*Daro mut*," he jeered, as Breckinge hesitated. "Don't be frightened. You will still be five armed men to three unarmed."

With a laugh that was intended to be contemptuous, Breckinge bade the sentries wait outside the door, and to enter instantly with the others if he shouted or fired his revolver.

The sentries went out of the room ; the door closed ; and Captain Alexander Breckinge was left alone with his three visitors.

" Well, Breckinge, my lad," said the man who had called himself Ghulam Hyder, as he removed the turban from his head and the squint from his eyes. " So you'd surrender this Fort, would you ? Run away—even though you've still got food, water, ammunition and enough men to defend the walls. *You cowardly little hound !* "

Breckinge stared open-mouthed and wide-eyed, his dusky face paling as the obviously English voice continued in a tone of bitterest contempt and unconcealed disgust.

" You are a credit to your name and to your Service, aren't you ? What have you got to say for yourself ? Let that pistol alone, you miserable cur, or I'll . . . "

Breckinge passed his tongue across his lips.

" Who are you ? " he whispered as he stared in bewildered fear at the three men who closed in upon him.

" Major Bartholomew Hazelrigg ; Indian Army ; Intelligence Department," was the brusque reply.

" This gentleman you have met before," he added, indicating the fairer of the two alleged Pathans, who also removed his *puggri* and stared Breckinge grimly in the eye.

" *Captain Richard Wendover*, formerly of Napier's Horse. Remember him ? "

Breckinge sprang to his feet and Hazelrigg picked up the revolver.

As Wendover took a step in his direction, Breckinge

literally staggered back, his eyes staring, his face livid with fear.

"*It's a lie!*" he screamed. "*He's dead! He's dead!*"

"Oh no, he's not," replied Wendover quietly. "But I shouldn't be surprised if you soon were, Breckinge."

"Who . . . ? How did . . . ? I . . . You . . ." stammered Breckinge, as his hand went to his throat. "This is . . ."

"Pull yourself together, man," said Hazelrigg. "Here, sit down in that chair and listen to me . . . I've caught you fairly and squarely, and before witnesses. Unfortunately several of them Indians, too. Your own subordinates and friends—not to say accomplices. Trying to surrender this Fort while it is defensible. And just to save your miserable life."

"I'm a doctor. I'm a doctor," gabbled Breckinge. "I have no authority to . . ."

"Come now! None of that!" interrupted Hazelrigg. "That won't do. Haven't you just been negotiating with me for the surrender of the place? Haven't you just been saying and proving that you were in complete authority here, and that the Native Officers would do exactly as you told them?"

"I am only the doctor. I . . ."

"Yes, and a pretty doctor. What were you going to do about the sick and wounded, when the place was evacuated? Stand by them and do your best for them? No, you were going to clear off, save your precious skin, and leave them to be butchered, as you thought."

"You cheated me."

"I did. Most successfully, eh? No doubt about that, Breckinge."

Breckinge glanced about the room like a trapped rat, his gaze resting on the door.

"Call those sentries in, if you like," said Hazelrigg. "I shall be calling them myself in a minute, to put you under arrest."

Breckinge's shifty gaze darted from Hazelrigg's face to that of Wendover.

"It's a trick! It's a lie! How do I know who you are?" he began. "How do I . . . ?"

"You don't. But you can take my word for it. And it doesn't matter whether you do or not. Do you recognize Captain Wendover? And do you remember the Fort at Ubele? And do you remember the charge brought against Captain Wendover? Do you remember what happened to him there—and how it happened? Do you remember the evidence you gave? Eh, Breckinge?"

It was painfully evident that Breckinge did remember Captain Wendover. Also that the sudden shock following upon the strain of the previous days had been too much for him, and that he had completely gone to pieces. He was trembling violently.

"You cannot prove . . ."

"Cannot prove what?" asked Major Hazelrigg; and without waiting for Breckinge to reply, continued:

"But that's where you are wrong, Breckinge. We can prove it. Not only that; but you are going to admit it."

Breckinge, like a trapped beast, dashing about its cage, made another attempt.

"And *you*! What about you?" he shouted. "Haven't you come here and cheated me, lied, made a plot, undermined my authority?"

"Oh, but you haven't got any, Breckinge. You're only a doctor," interrupted Hazelrigg.

"You call yourself a British Officer and you've trapped the garrison of this place into surrendering," chattered Breckinge. "You've come in here and persuaded the Subedar-Major to surrender, and proved to me that it was the best thing; and that I ought to support him; and that I ought to save as many of the garrison as I could."

Hazelrigg laughed aloud.

"Why," continued Breckinge hysterically, "I should never have thought of such a thing. The word 'surrender' would never have entered my head if . . ."

"That's enough, Breckinge," interrupted Hazelrigg again. "You are not doing yourself any good. Confusing heads, aren't you? Yours and mine."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean the possibility of your surrendering this place would never have entered *my* head, but that your messenger came to the Pathan leader with your proposals for surrender."

"I had a good talk with that messenger," added Hazelrigg.

Breckinge sat down as though his legs would no longer support him.

"Anything more to say? No. There really is nothing to say, is there? You convicted an innocent man once, Breckinge, and now you've convicted a guilty one—yourself—and out of your own mouth. You've done your best to surrender this Fort to me, to abandon it to the enemy, and to desert your sick and wounded.

"I'm not quite certain as to what your responsi-

bility is in the matter of the defence of the Fort, in the circumstances. Doubtless you can plead at the Court-Martial that the fact of the British combatant Officers being dead did not leave you in military command of the place or make you responsible for the conduct of the defence.

"I don't know about that," he continued, "but we shall find out all about it at your trial. What I do know is that every decent white man will think you are the yellowest cur that ever bore a British name and wore the British uniform. For attempting to surrender, I mean."

Breckinge took his hands from before his face, which he had rested in them.

"I am only a doctor," he said again, moistening his lips.

"*Only!*" said Hazelrigg quietly. "Did you ever hear of Doctor Whitchurch? Like you, he was in a siege. He added British Officer's duty to Doctor's duty. Did them both magnificently, and was awarded the Victoria Cross—as a soldier. As a soldier, Breckinge.

"Now the second point," he continued. "Setting aside the question as to whether the defence naturally devolved upon you as the one surviving white man and British official, what about the question of your being the support and main-stay of the responsible defenders, the power behind the Native Officers?"

"Had you any duty to inspire the defence? To be what is called the life and soul of the garrison? To strain every nerve to keep the Subedar-Major and his two worthy relatives up to their job? To keep the men hopeful and stout-hearted? To keep their tails

up? Was it in any wise your duty—merely as a doctor—to fight the spirit of defeatism, as you would any other foul microbe? Any part of your duty to show the sort of spirit that that Havildar showed just now?

“What will the Court-Martial have to say on that point, supposing for a moment that you did escape on the technical point that you weren’t a combatant Officer?”

“I . . . I . . .” stammered Breckinge. “The men’s lives . . . It was my duty to save . . .”

“My God! I could wring your neck,” growled Hazelrigg. “Men’s lives, you rotten hound. What about those poor devils on their backs with typhoid, dysentery and malaria, and those with wounds. Wounds *in front*, Breckinge. What about *their* lives, you dog?”

Again Breckinge’s face went down into his hands and his shoulders began to shake.

“And that’s the third point that the Court-Martial will deal with, Breckinge. Suppose, as a Gazetted Officer, bearing a military rank and title, you had no responsibility for the defence; suppose, as the Medical Officer attached to the garrison, you had no responsibility whatsoever for trying to keep up the men’s courage and fighting-spirit, and for inspiring a stout defence; what about your responsibility to your own sick and wounded? Can you evade that? Suppose that were the only charge brought against you at the Court-Martial, how would you defend your conduct?”

There was no reply but the now uncontrolled sobbing of the accused man, completely broken and abjectly terrified.

“Yes, it’s pretty bad, isn’t it?” observed Hazelrigg

with a shrug of the shoulders and a glance at Wendover. "Pretty bad—entering into treasonable correspondence with the King's enemies. It won't be a mere case of ruin and disgrace, and your name a by-word in your Service, in the Indian Army, and among all decent people, European and native . . ."

"What will they . . .? What shall I . . .?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. I should think they'd shoot you. I certainly would. Anyhow, a long term of imprisonment is the very least you can hope for. Depends on the view they take; but whether, in the circumstances, you were responsible for the defence of the Fort or not, there is no getting away from the fact that you did your utmost to surrender it."

Suddenly Breckinge shot out a hand and pointing finger towards the face of the other Pathan, and in a voice rising almost to a scream:

"Who are you? Who are you?" he cried. *"Why does he stare at me like that?"*

And in point of fact, the hungrily ferocious glare with which Shere Khan had been regarding Breckinge's face, from the moment of his entry into the room was, to a person in a condition bordering upon hysteria, sufficiently daunting.

"Never mind who he is, for the moment," replied Hazelrigg. "What he knows is of more importance."

In pitiable anxiety and terror, Breckinge continued to stare at Shere Khan. How could this man know more than Hazelrigg and Wendover, of his attempt to surrender the Fort and abandon the wounded?

"He knows the truth of what happened at Ubele, Breckinge," continued Hazelrigg. "He knows the part you played in what happened there."

"I didn't . . . I didn't . . . I never . . ." began Breckinge.

"Oh, yes, you did," interrupted Hazelrigg. "It'll be a pretty story on top of this one, won't it?"

"There's no evidence. There can't be evidence. Nobody but myself knew . . ."

"What about?" asked Hazelrigg quickly.

"I had been experimenting for years. It was purely scientific research and . . ."

"What a twister you are!" growled Hazelrigg. "What a liar. First about this Fort, and then about that one . . . We know exactly what happened there, just as we do about what happened here. It's no good, Breckinge."

"But you can't know. Nobody but me could possibly know. There's no evidence."

"Of what?" snapped Hazelrigg.

Breckinge's eyes fell.

"No, it's no good, Breckinge. Wriggling won't help you. Far better make a clean breast of it, and help yourself that way," urged Hazelrigg.

Breckinge rose to his feet.

"Major, I swear," he began.

"I've no doubt you do," interrupted Hazelrigg. "But swearing won't help you. You are caught, Breckinge . . . No evidence! You've got a surprise coming."

"And now, there's another little matter," he continued. "Remember Azizun at Madrutta?"

Breckinge literally recoiled.

What was this? Now what other dreadful thing was coming up from the past? Was this man the Devil himself?

"Azizun?" he whispered.

"Yes, charming girl; but it doesn't do to trust them. Notoriously unreliable people. Give their own father away for a handful of rupees. You let her know too much, Breckinge."

Breckinge plucked up spirit and strength for another twist.

"The evidence of a bazaar woman? Haven't you yourself just said that . . ."

"Oh, quite. Quite," replied Hazelrigg. "Wouldn't hang a dog on the word of a *dusi* like Azizun. But they often have very interesting information. Information that one can investigate. Yes, they can often tell you interesting little stories that you can investigate—and prove. Remember Abdul Ghaffar, the Gulf Arab; the pearl merchant, eh?"

Evidently Breckinge had received yet another shock. He sat speechless and shaking.

"Well?"

"Major Hazelrigg, you don't surely believe . . .?"

"No. I don't believe. I know. I know what it was that disagreed so violently with Abdul Ghaffar that night in Azizun's house, when he lost the little wash-leather bag of pearls that he always carried about with him. Lost his pearls as well as his life. I know what it was that upset him Breckinge, *and I know where it came from.*"

"Major, before God, I swear . . . I didn't mean . . ."

"No; Devil doubt you. I don't suppose you did. Azizun overdid it, didn't she? Careless. Clumsy. What she asked you for, was a little sleeping-draught for her boy friend, wasn't it? A few knock-out drops. But they knocked poor old Abdul Ghaffar off his

perch, once and for all. Seemed to get drunk suddenly; stayed drunk; and died drunk. And Abdul Ghaffar was a strict Mussulman who never touched alcohol in his life."

Again the dark face, now of an almost olive green, sank into the brown pink-palmed hands, as the wretched man groaned aloud.

"Allah! Is it a woman or a pariah dog," wondered Shere Khan aloud, in Pushtu.

Hazelrigg glanced at Wendover, who shook his head deprecatingly.

Yes, it was pretty painful, agreed Hazelrigg silently, as he correctly read Wendover's look.

"Now Breckinge," he said, with a change of voice in which there was a hint of human-kindness. "Just understand, quite plainly, once and for all, that it's no good. You may as well confess. I don't want to give you any false hopes, or to deceive you in the matter. You have no defence whatever. You haven't a leg to stand on, and the one and only thing you can do for yourself, is to make a clean breast of it—that is to say, to admit, fully and freely, what I can prove clearly and completely.

"There's no need for you to do so in the matter of this Fort, for you've shown your hand to me yourself. You had put your cards on the table before you knew who I was. About the other matters, I have, as I've shown you, complete knowledge and more than sufficient evidence. Now then, I'm going to put you under arrest and give you time to think it over."

Breckinge looked up.

"Major Hazelrigg, I am not a soldier," he began.

"You are not," agreed Hazelrigg.

"First of all," he continued, "go to the door and tell those four men to report to the Subedar-Major for duty; and tell one of them to send that Havildar here. The 'mutinous' one, I mean."

Breckinge rose to his feet.

"And by the way," added Hazelrigg, "don't do anything foolish—for your own sake."

Breckinge glanced at the revolver in Hazelrigg's hand, went to the door, and gave the requisite orders to the sentries.

"Close the door and come back and sit down," said Hazelrigg, when this had been done.

"Listen—and be very careful. When that Havildar comes, tell him who I am. D'you hear? Tell him I am Major Hazelrigg of the Indian Army, that I have made my way into this Fort in disguise, and have taken command of it. Understand? Then send him to fetch those men of whom he spoke, the men who were going to back him up in his refusal to join in the surrender of this Fort.

"There will be no risk in withdrawing them," he added. "The place won't be attacked yet awhile.

"Not while 'the Hadji's sons' are here," he smiled grimly.

The door opened and Havildar Umrao Singh entered.

"Now then, Captain Breckinge," said Hazelrigg in English. "Stand up. Tell this non-commissioned officer who I am."

Havildar Umrao Singh stared in astonishment to see the apparent Pathan standing there bare-headed, and to hear him speaking English.

Breckinge obeyed, explaining the situation clearly in Hindustani.

The Havildar turned and stared incredulously at Hazelrigg.

"It's the truth, Havildar," said Hazelrigg. "I am Hazelrigg Sahib. I am a Major Sahib of the Indian Army; and I have got in here with this other Officer Sahib in disguise. I have sent for you to say '*Shábash.*' Well done. I am pleased with you. And the General Sahib will be pleased with you. I shall give you promotion to temporary rank of Jemadar, and without doubt, the General Sahib will confirm you in that rank."

"I don't understand, Sahib," faltered the man.

"No; a bit sudden for you, eh? You will understand better when you see me and this other Officer Sahib in uniform."

He turned to Breckinge.

"Now Captain Breckinge, you yourself tell the Havildar to bring the men of his Section here, those upon whom he said he could rely to refuse to surrender."

Breckinge gave the necessary orders, and apparently doubting the evidence both of his ears and his eyes, the Havildar saluted and left the room.

"Now then, Breckinge," said Hazelrigg. "I want a tunic, shorts, puttees and boots, Sam Brown belt, and so forth. There must be plenty of kit that belonged to Major Denbrough, Captain Scott and Mr. Henderson. One tunic will have a crown on the shoulder-strap and the other a Captain's stars—for Captain Wendover. After I have twisted the Native Officers' tails and spoken to the men, I'm going back to the Pathan camp—for a little while—leaving Captain Wendover in command."

"But he's not . . ."

"Don't let that worry you, Breckinge," interrupted Hazelrigg. "I am the Senior, and in fact, only, British Officer in this part of the world. I am the 'competent military authority' in Giltraza Fort and for a few hundred miles round it; and I am going to take it upon me to reinstate Captain Wendover—whom I know to be innocent of the charge of which he was found guilty—until such time as my action is confirmed. He will command this Fort.

"There will be no surrender, Breckinge," he added.

Again Breckinge rose to his feet and, apparently plucking up courage and attempting protest, began :

"I shall not accept . . ."

"Nobody asked what you would accept," interrupted Hazelrigg. "You will be under open arrest, and you will hold no communication whatsoever with any of the garrison except the sick and wounded; and you will not leave this room except to carry on your medical duties."

The tramp of feet was heard outside the door, and the Havildar entered, followed by a *naik* and a squad of sepoys.

"Good," said Hazelrigg. "Line up over there and stand easy until I come back."

"Now Breckinge," said he in English, "these are the 'mutineers,' one of whom you talked of shooting. Stay where you are until I come back—and don't talk to them. Understand?"

And he gave further orders in Pushtu to Shere Khan who received them gladly.

"Don't do anything foolish while I am out of the room, Breckinge, for your own sake," he added, nod-

ding towards Shere Khan. "Come on, Wendover, and we'll rig ourselves out for the next act."

The remaining Officers' Quarters yielded all that was required, though the largest tunics were somewhat tight for Hazelrigg.

"You had better have this one when I push off, Wendover," he said, "but the one you've got will do for the present. You look all right in that."

"What about appearing in shirt and shorts with stars on the shirt shoulder-straps?" said Wendover, as he hastily shaved in cold water, with a dead officer's razor.

"No. Better have the tunic, I think, even if it's not too good a fit. It isn't a General's Inspection, after all.

"Gad, what a small head poor Denbrough had," he observed as he put on the late Major Denbrough's helmet.

"Or else what a fat one you've got," replied Wendover.

"Let me try that one . . . Ah, that's better. You can have it afterwards, with the tunic. Now then, what about boots? Amazing how much more of a man one feels, with boots on. It's what I miss most when I go native."

"Same here," agreed Wendover. "Good job young Henderson was a tall man."

"Lord, I can't get into these. Wonder if Henderson had a spare pair?"

"Must have done."

A few minutes later, Major Bartholomew Hazelrigg and the *ci-devant* Captain Wendover returned to Breckinge's room, correctly and fully dressed as British Officers on active service, in lace-up brown boots,

putties, shorts, tunics with rank-badges on their shoulder-straps, regulation khaki shirts and regulation khaki ties, Kitchener helmets, Sam Brown belts, sword-frogs and revolver holsters.

The sepoys stiffened to attention and stared in stolid amazement.

Hazelrigg addressed them.

"Listen, men. There has been an arrangement, a plan on the part of the Sirkar, to fool and defeat the enemy. Relief is coming soon; and if it were not, I know that you are the sort of stout *bahadurs* who'd fight to the last. Havildar Umrao Singh will give me your names, and I shall recommend you all for promotion to *naik* as quickly as possible.

"Now then, Captain Wendover Sahib is going to take over command of the Fort. I am going out to play a trick upon the enemy and to hasten the relief. The enemy shall not take Fort Giltraza. The Captain Sahib will defend it from within, and I shall be helping it from without. Remember that, and be of stout heart, if many more days go by and the enemy seem to prevail. But they will not. Dismiss, Havildar, and give my salaams to the Subedar-Major Saheb and tell him I wish to see him here."

The sepoys clattered out, the light of new hope entirely changing the weary expression of their gaunt faces.

The sight of Hazelrigg and Wendover dressed and accoutred as British Officers had had a prompt and powerful effect on Breckinge.

When they had gone from the room dressed as Pathans, he had seemed to be recovering something of his manhood, plucking up a little spirit and gaining some control of his nerves.

Now it was evident that he realized the hopelessness of his position and fully understood that he was lost. Here, before him, was the first of those judges who would try him, convict him, condemn him and sentence him to he knew not what. Here were his accusers, provided with irrefutable evidence. And one of them was his former victim, the man whom he had thought to be dead, the man whom he had brought to ruin and disgrace—now re-habilitated, re-instated.

Again a rigor of trembling seized him.

"Before the Subedar-Major comes, Breckinge," said Hazelrigg as the last sepoy closed the door, "I think I ought to inform you that he was not a loyal and trustworthy accomplice. As I said before, I don't want to deceive you and take advantage of your position, and there is no need for me to do so."

And placing his hands upon the table, leaning his weight upon them and approaching his face towards that of the trembling Breckinge, he added, with mien and voice of the utmost solemnity, gravity and significance :

"I have had a talk with him, Breckinge."

"But he never knew. He never knew," began Breckinge. "I swear to you, Major . . ."

"No, he didn't actually know the nature of the drug. I don't pretend that he did; but he knew perfectly well that you administered it, didn't he? You had better confess, Breckinge. It's the one chance you have of, in any way, mitigating the severity of your punishment."

Breckinge stared idiotically, opening and closing his mouth without making a sound.

"Besides," added Hazelrigg, "it's about the one

and only thing that you could do to improve my opinion of you.

“Or,” he added significantly, “to change my attitude towards you. At the present moment, I fully admit, I am all for the utmost rigour of the law.”

A quick look of intelligence came into Breckinge’s eyes.

What was this? A hint that this terrible man Hazelrigg might possibly be inclined to bargain with him, might offer something in return for an admission? Possibly let him get away with it? His defences would be down, his cards would be on the table, once he had made the confession, but what of that, if he got something in return? Clearly Hazelrigg knew enough to destroy him completely, apart from his catching him out, in the matter of the surrender of the Fort.

Yes, he was utterly done for, if it came to a Court-Martial, with Hazelrigg giving evidence against him. There could be neither help nor hope. Nothing could save him. Whereas if Hazelrigg offered anything, promised anything, he would keep his word. Better get what he could out of the wreck. Better something than nothing. But he must keep a hold upon himself, must not go to pieces; and above all, he must walk warily, must not be precipitate.

Yes. Better something than nothing. He might save his life if that were in danger; might save himself from gaol; might even escape scot-free, if he bargained well—with proof of Wendover’s innocence as purchase-price. He might. But—he’d wait and see what the Subedar-Major said.

The door opened and that officer entered.

The sight that he beheld struck him almost as a blow.

He could not believe his eyes as he stared at a British Officer, a Major of the Indian Army.

"*Jadu!*" he whispered. "*Jadu!* It is magic."

And then as he glanced at the other figure in khaki, he shrank back, his face taking that tinge which, in a European, would be a loss of colour and a paling to whiteness.

"It's a *bhut!*" he whispered. "It is the ghost of Captain Wendover Sahib."

Hazelrigg addressed him sharply in Hindustani.

"Now then, Subedar-Major Saheb," said he, "what have you got to say for yourself? Is this the way you carry out the Sirkar's orders; obey the last instructions of Major Denbrough Sahib? Is this how you uphold the *izzat* of your Regiment, and of the Indian Army? What have you got to say for yourself? Nothing?"

"It is the Pathan, Ghulam Hyder!" murmured the astounded officer.

Yes, the Major Sahib had made his way into the Fort disguised as a Pathan. For though he wore Major's uniform, and obviously was a Sahib, he still had the beard, and, beneath his helmet, the shaggy hair, of Ghulam Hyder. But the Subedar-Major had often seen British Officers with beards and shaggy hair, on active service.

But the other!

The other was Captain Wendover Sahib himself.

Almost exactly as he used to be.

How had he got into the Fort?

This was witchcraft, devilry, magic. There was no end to the cleverness of the Sahibs.

"Well, what have you got to say for yourself?" snapped Hazelrigg. "There is nothing to say, is there? You are caught in the act of trying to . . ."

"Sahib . . . I . . . It was the Doctor Sahib's order . . ."

"Oh, you are trying to shift the responsibility on to the doctor, are you? Aren't you the Subedar-Major, commanding the men of this garrison since the last British Officer was killed? Aren't you the Senior Officer, and isn't the doctor—the doctor?"

"Sahib, Doctor Breckinge Sahib is a Captain Sahib and ranks above me. It was he . . ."

"And suppose, when the doctor told you to surrender you had replied :

"*'You are the Doctor Sahib. I shall not surrender this Fort at your order.'* Do you suppose that you, the Subedar-Major, the officer in command of the sepoy, would have been punished for disobeying the doctor?"

"Sahib, it was an order."

"Then what about Havildar Umrao Singh? He had an order, and from you, his own officer. But he refused to obey it, and said that several of his men would support him, and would also refuse to obey it . . . Now then; what do I do, do you suppose? Punish him, or see that he is promoted, rewarded, decorated? Well?"

The Subedar-Major's eyes fell.

"Sahib, it was an order," he said again. "The Doctor Sahib said the lives of the men must be saved."

"It's a lie," cried Breckinge springing to his feet. "It's a *banao*. You said the men could not fight any longer, and that you'd have to surrender, and that the best thing was to get terms. It was you who first

spoke of surrender, and I said it was your business to defend the Fort and mine to look after the wounded."

The Subedar-Major turned, scowling, to Breckinge.

"Those are not true words," he said. "My brothers are witnesses to . . ."

"Yes, there are too many 'brothers' here, altogether," interrupted Hazelrigg. "Is that all you've got to say before I put you under arrest?"

"It was the Doctor Sahib's order," repeated the Subedar-Major, doggedly and sullenly, once again.

"You are a liar," cried Breckinge again. "You came to me and said . . ."

"Look here, aren't you both forgetting that I was Ghulam Hyder the Pathap, and heard all that was said?" interrupted Hazelrigg.

"I mean, before you came, Sahib. Before you came as Ghulam Hyder," replied the Subedar-Major. "The Doctor Sahib sent for me and said we must surrender, and that we must send a messenger to the Hadji."

"You liar!" screamed Breckinge.

"Oh, he's a liar, is he?" observed Hazelrigg. "And was he lying about what happened at Ubele?"

Breckinge's glance fell as the Subedar-Major, with a quick glance at Hazelrigg, uttered an exclamation.

What had the Doctor Sahib admitted to this devil of a Major Sahib? Had the doctor told a foul lie about that, too, and brought false accusation against his faithful friend and . . . helper?

And as, almost insanely, he bit at his finger-tips, Breckinge similarly wondered. What had this scoundrel already said to Hazelrigg, incriminating Breckinge, in order to exculpate himself? Had he admitted

knowledge of the drugging of Wendover? And when had Hazelrigg talked with the Subedar-Major? While he was out of the room, changing from Pathan dress to uniform?

What had been said? . . . What had been said? Where was he? He was in the dark. What should he do? What should he say?

"Sahib, I don't know what the doctor said about what happened at Ubele," replied the Subedar-Major, "but if he said that I knew anything of the putting of *dawa* in Captain Wendover's Sahib's *khana*, it is false."

"Then how do you know that something was put in his food?" snapped Hazelrigg.

The man looked utterly confused.

"Sahib . . . afterwards . . . he told me . . . I didn't know that he was going to do it or I would have warned the Captain Sahib. I didn't know. I . . ."

"Come with me," ordered Hazelrigg curtly. "Stay where you are, Breckinge."

"Major Hazelrigg, I . . ."

"Hold your tongue."

"I'll leave him to you, Wendover," he added grimly, as he led the way from the room and into the neighbouring one, which had been Major Denbrough's.

"Now then, Subedar-Major," said he, closing the door. "You are in a very dangerous position. First of all, you try to surrender this Fort . . ."

"Sahib, I didn't wish . . ."

"Silence. Listen to me. First of all, you were, at any rate, willing to accept Captain Breckinge's order to surrender this Fort, instead of refusing, as a brave man would have done. In the second place, you

admitted that you knew that Captain Wendover Sahib was drugged when he was accused of being *béhosh* through drinking too much *sherab*, and you gave false evidence at the Court-Martial."

"Sahib, it was afterwards that I came to know about it."

"Well? And did you immediately go to your Colonel and tell him the truth? You know perfectly well that a man who is an accessory after the fact is as bad as one who is an accessory before it. To know afterwards, and say nothing, is as bad as to know beforehand and to say nothing."

"Sahib, I feared that . . ."

"Yes, you are great at fearing. Now listen to me. Your one chance of saving yourself from prison and disgrace, with the loss of your rank and your pension and of your *izzat* for ever, is to tell me all the truth, to make the fullest confession. As a matter of fact, if you don't do so, and I decide upon it, I can have you shot for cowardice."

Quickly the man knelt and placed his turban at Hazelrigg's feet, making a motion as of pouring dust upon his head.

"Mercy, Sahib," he whispered.

"That's all very well. Listen. If you want any mercy from me, you will tell me the whole truth; and after that, you will show that you are not what I think you are, a coward as well as a rascal. This Fort is not going to surrender. It is going to fight until the relief comes. You are going to be Court-Martialled after the relief, and a full confession *now* will be your chance, your only chance, of getting any mercy from me. Now then, out with it."

And the badly frightened man gabbled his confession.

But in spite of physical weakness and mental strain ; in spite of the terrible shock he had suffered at the discovery that Ghulam Hyder was a British field-officer ; that Captain Wendover was alive ; and the fact that this terrible man had caught him in the act of trying to surrender, his admissions were both garbled and guarded.

Nevertheless, it was abundantly clear that he was perfectly well aware that Wendover had never been in the habit of drinking to excess, had not been drunk when found unconscious at Ubele ; and that the state in which Wendover had been found, was entirely due to "treatment" by the doctor.

What, even in his extremity of misery and fear, the Subedar-Major would not admit, was that he was a party to, and an accessory before the fact of, the deliberate drugging of Captain Wendover.

Nevertheless, Hazelrigg obtained his completest admission that he knew that Wendover did not drink ; had never been drunk ; and that, after the Court-Martial, he had learned that Wendover had been rendered unconscious by the use of a drug. How this interesting information had been received he could not say ; and when Hazelrigg corrected that form of words to '*would* not say,' though agitated, confused and desperate, he professed to be wholly unable to remember how he had come by the knowledge.

Hazelrigg summed him up as a man of character and standards far inferior to those of the average Native Officer ; far more cunning than clever ; and, though probably not a definitely despicable scoundrel like

Breckinge, a fairly worthy friend, disciple and confederate of the abler and wickedder man.

Nor did Hazelrigg feel that there was anything to fear from the Subedar-Major's gang-loyalty and staunchness ; from his fidelity to his leader in rascality. He was certain that, could he bring about a position where the man must either sacrifice Breckinge or suffer equally with him, there need be no doubt as to his line of action.

" So it comes to this then, Subedar-Major, on your own admission, that you at any rate knew of the *banao* ; you knew, either before or afterwards, that Captain Wendover had been drugged. You knew perfectly well who did it, and why that person did it. For reasons of your own—not unconnected with the fact that you were under threat of Court-Martial—you said nothing. Well, that's pretty bad. Bad enough to ruin you absolutely.

" And on top of that you, as responsible officer temporarily in command of the Fort, wished to surrender it . . . Yes, yes, I know you want to put the blame on somebody else, but you cannot do it. Now then, the line that I shall take when this fighting is over, will be largely—very largely—determined by your effort to get justice for Captain Wendover and by your conduct during the remainder of the siege. As I have told you, Captain Wendover will be in command of the Fort. You will be his Second-in-Command, and he will report to me—and you know perfectly well that he will report with the utmost fairness—on the way in which you support him."

" Sahib, I will do anything . . . "

" Well, see you do it. Now then, I'm going to

send for your two relatives. While they are present, don't speak, except to answer any question I may ask you."

The man looked up with pleading eyes.

"Sahib, there is one other thing. Suppose that, most unfortunately, Captain Wendover Sahib should die . . . be killed . . . during the siege."

"Then that will be just too bad—for you—Subedar-Major. That will be bad luck. For nothing on this earth can do you any good now, but your confession and Captain Wendover's personal report to me, that your conduct has been absolutely splendid. Not merely ordinary, good and correct carrying on of duty, mind, but worthy of the highest commendation. If he tells me you've really deserved special mention in despatches, and a decoration, I might consider letting that cancel out the rest—provided you make a full confession to me and speak the truth, at the proper time, about what happened at Ubele. Understand?"

It was clear that the Subedar-Major understood; and Hazelrigg felt that Wendover would be able to count upon the utmost that was in the Subedar-Major—for what it was worth.

After considering the man coldly and quite unfavourably for the space of a minute, he said:

"Come with me," and led the way to the room in which he had left Breckinge, Wendover and Shere Khan.

Opening the door, he discovered Breckinge sitting in a state of apparent collapse, his folded arms upon the table, his head upon his arms, his face concealed.

Watching him, with stony face, stood Wendover, while with a face anything but stony, Shere Khan gloated in triumph.

"Stand over there, Subedar-Major, and don't forget that I wish you to hold no conversation with your brother-in-law and other relative, nor to make any observation whatsoever except in answer to a question from me," ordered Hazelrigg.

And to the sentry who was closing the door, he called :

"Oh, Sepoy! Subedar Sahib ko salaam do."

Raising his head, Breckinge stared in silent and abject misery at Hazelrigg.

Saluting, the sentry hurried off in search of Subedar Gopal Mangal, the Subedar-Major's brother-in-law.

When this man entered, a minute later, the shock that he received, as evinced by his physical start of surprise, would, at a less serious and tensely dramatic moment, have been ludicrous. Literally, he seemed unable to believe his eyes as they beheld two British Officers, one of whom was—no, could not be—yes, undoubtedly was—the long-dead officer who had been the victim of the plot at Ubele, Captain Wendover Sahib. His wide-eyed, gaping, open-mouthed look of amazement changed to a quick glance of anxious suspicion as he caught sight of his brother-in-law. Immediately he adopted an attitude of stolidity and impassiveness, assuming the Indian '*You-are-my-father-and-my-mother-I-am-a-poor-man-and-I-know-nothing*' look that Hazelrigg knew so well.

"Salaam, Subedar Saheb," said the latter coldly, fixing the Native Officer's eyes with a hard and penetrating stare. "So you are the Second-in-Command of this Fort—and equally willing to surrender it while still defensible."

"Sahib, it was an order."

"Yes. Your brother-in-law's order."

"Sahib, it was the Doctor Sahib's order."

"Oh? Well—whosoever order it was, you were quite ready to obey it. I've heard no protest from you."

"Sahib it was an order and . . ."

"Yes. It was an order, and like a well-disciplined soldier you accepted it without a word, and were prepared to obey it. You weren't like that mutinous fellow Havildar Umrao Singh, were you?"

The man's glance fell.

"Anything to say?"

And again the man repeated the talisman that it was a *hukm*.

"Well," replied Hazelrigg patiently, "I'm not holding you responsible. I am merely observing that you made no protest against the surrender of the Fort of which you were Second-in-Command. You agreed with your brother-in-law in this matter, exactly as you agreed with him *in the other matter—at Ubele Fort*. Now . . ."

Breckinge sprang to his feet, uttered an inarticulate sound, and sank back into his chair as Shere Khan growled and motioned to him to be silent.

"Sahib . . . I . . ." began the Subedar.

"It's only fair for me to tell you, Subedar, that your brother-in-law has made complete confession about that. He has admitted to knowing that Captain Wendover was poisoned, drugged; that he was the victim of a villainous and scoundrelly *banao*."

Sliding sideways, Breckinge slumped heavily to the ground as he fainted.

The look upon the Subedar's face was now genuine

enough. Another quick glance at his relative, a moistening of lips, and a shocked and shame-faced quailing before the accusing eye of this Officer who stood in judgment.

"Sahib, I . . . I . . ."

"Well . . .? Well . . .? No, there isn't much to say, is there? Since your brother-in-law has confessed. I've got something to say, though; and it is this—that you haven't exactly shone and distinguished yourself by your stout-heartedness during the siege of this Fort. Also that you will hear some very unpleasant things, including a sentence, when a Court-Martial learns that you knew perfectly well, fully and completely, what happened at Ubele, and never said a word."

"Sahib, it was after . . ."

"It's no good, Subedar. You won't improve the position a bit, either by lying or by wriggling and twisting like a trapped snake. Even supposing, for one moment, you were speaking the truth, and you didn't know until afterwards, does that excuse you in the slightest degree for not immediately going to your Colonel and telling him what you had learned?"

"Now listen. I am considering exactly what I shall do with you and your brother-in-law. What it will be I don't yet know, but I do know this. It will depend very much on your making a full confession to me, as your brother has done; on your conduct during the rest of this siege; on the support that you give to Captain Wendover; and the example you set to your men. In fact, what happens to you will, to a very great extent, depend on yourself and the report that Captain Wendover gives me."

And having puzzled, terrified and admonished the Subedar, Hazelrigg again opened the door of the room and bade the sentry give his salaams to the Jemadar.

To this man also, it evidently appeared that magic had been done, miracles worked when before his astounded and incredulous eyes appeared two British Officers, both of whom must have impossibly materialized from within the Fort itself, and one of them returned from the dead.

Towards him, Hazelrigg was less severe but equally contemptuous, and by implication, contrasted his ready acquiescence in surrender with the refusal of the Havildar to obey his superior officer's orders.

Him also Hazelrigg accused of being accessory before or after the event, if not of actual connivance and complicity, in the matter of the plot against Wendover; and when he would have defended himself, told him that defence was vain, inasmuch as his relative, the Subedar-Major, and the Subedar had both confessed. As neither of these men denied it, but merely stood in dumb and shamefaced misery, making no attempt to defend themselves, the Jemadar accepted the rebuke both for his easy acquiescence in surrender and his guilty knowledge of the crime committed at Ubele against Wendover.

Justified of his faith in his ability to obtain partial confession from the Subedar-Major, more comprehensive admission from the Subedar and even less guarded admission from the Jemadar, Hazelrigg, with final exhortation, bade them go, and from that moment change their own attitude, and strain every nerve to change that of their men towards the question of the continuation of the defence of the Fort.

"I shall shortly make the rounds," he concluded, "and shall have a word with every non-commissioned officer. I will then address one half of the men in the courtyard, while the others remain at their posts. When the latter are relieved, I will then speak to them also. And I shall have a word with each of the sick and wounded. I shall tell all the men that Captain Wendover Sahib has come to take command of the Fort, and to guarantee its successful defence until the arrival of the Relief Force, and final victory. You may go."

Breckinge sat up and stared stupidly about him.

"Now then, Breckinge," said Hazelrigg when the Native Officers had departed. "I think I have, to some extent, undone your good work; and I don't think we shall hear any more of defeatism and surrender. Now listen to me.

"If it comes to my knowledge that you say one more word in that direction to anybody, I will have no mercy on you; and I will take prompt and drastic action. You know what I mean, don't you? Now about the other matter.

"The Subedar-Major, your accomplice, or tool, has given you away about what happened at Ubele. I am going to have that in writing. You heard what his relatives have said. I will have their depositions in writing, too.

"I have held out to them a little hope of there being some chance of their improving their position somewhat, by their conduct during the remainder of the siege. Also by doing their utmost to assist Justice afterwards, when the question of Captain Wendover's reinstatement arises; and when, in view of my report,

a Court-Martial enquires into your conduct both here and at Ubele.

"I haven't the slightest doubt in my own mind that the three of them will be only too anxious to assist me in every way, also, when Captain Wendover's case is re-opened on the strength of my statement as to my discoveries, and my action in putting him in charge of the defence of Fort Giltraza.

"Now, I want you to grasp this clearly. I shall be leaving this place in an hour or two, alone, and shall not return until the relieving force arrives, when it will be too late for me to do anything for you—anything whatsoever—even should I be disposed to do so. You will remain in this room until I leave the Fort. Before I do so, I will come and ask you if you've anything to say.

"It will be your last chance of helping yourself," he added.

Leaving Shere Khan in charge of the situation, Hazelrigg then returned with Wendover to the adjoining room. Closing the door, he heaved a sigh of relief.

"Wendover, my son," he said, "we shall do it. We've got him." Now he thinks that the others have given it away, he'll make a clean breast of it and throw himself on my mercy. And I don't think he'll find I have got much of that in stock, until he has made a full confession—in writing."

"He'd never do that," said Wendover.

"Well then, if he doesn't, we've still got him. What with the fact of its being my word against his that he confessed verbally, and the evidence of the Native Officers, I don't think there can be a shadow of a doubt of your completest exoneration and reinstate-

ment, even apart from the fact that you are going to save the situation here. Going to do all sorts of wonderful daps. England will ring with the story. There won't be a newspaper in the civilized world that won't have the account, both of the cruel wrong and of the brilliant exploit. My dear chap, it will be a front-page feature of every newspaper in the British Isles, India and the whole British Empire. And America, too. Talk about clearing your name! It'll be immortalized. You will not only be rehabilitated and reinstated, but reinstated in a blaze of glory."

Wendover smiled.

"My dear chap, I would hate to seem ungrateful, but do you know, I haven't the very slightest desire to be—er—immortalized. As to being reinstated . . . well . . ."

"Now, don't talk like that. Whether you want it or not, it's going to be done. And if you honestly don't care about glory for yourself, what about your friends?"

"Shere Khan and his family? They're my friends. And they don't . . ."

Hazelrigg seized Wendover by the shoulder and shook him.

"Come on," he said; and the drooping spirits of the garrison of Fort Giltraza were galvanized to new life by the incredible apparition of two British Officers making the rounds at *Stand-to*, with a cheery word to each man they passed.

After complete inspection, Hazelrigg, in the presence of Wendover and the Native Officers, addressed the sepoys at two parades, praising them for their defence of the Fort, telling them that the siege was practically

over, that relief was at hand, and that all they had to do was to put up a stout defence for the few remaining days. What they must do for the short time of danger, trial and hardship that remained, was to keep sharpest watch and ward ; to fight desperately if the Fort were attacked again ; and to see to it that all they had undertaken was not brought to nought through the capture of the Fort almost in the very presence of the relieving force. But that of course would not happen.

And it was a force endowed with new life, hope and courage that resumed the defence when dismissed to carry on.

Nor was the effect of the visit of the British Officers to the miserable hospital less marked. To most of the wounded and stricken sufferers, it seemed that the relief had come ; and nothing was said to disillusion them. Let those who must die, die the happier ; and those who might recover, recover the more quickly.

Anyhow, British Officers had entered the Fort, and if all were not now well, it soon would be.

And having accomplished everything that could be done, Hazelrigg bade Wendover take over full command of Giltraza Fort.

" I'll see Breckinge again, before I change my kit," he said.

An orderly approached and saluted, saying that the Doctor Sahib sent his salaams.

" He sent you ? " asked Hazelrigg.

" *Nahin*, Sahib," replied the man. A sepoy standing outside his door had called him and told him that the Doctor Sahib wished to speak to the Major Sahib.

" That's interesting," observed Hazelrigg to Wend-

over. "Looks hopeful. I wonder if he wanted to come out, and Shere Khan wouldn't let him. Anyhow, he has got something to say, I'll see him alone. Then I'll change back to Ghulam Hyder, and have a word with you at the gate before I go back to the Hadji."

"But I say," expostulated Wendover, "is it safe to . . ."

"Safe?" smiled Hazelrigg.

"But I mean . . . well, what are you going to tell him?"

"Why, that the wicked people in here covered us with rifles, heard what I had got to say, and kept the other two as hostages."

"So the idea will be that Breckinge is still commanding the Fort and has pinched a couple of the deputation, eh? A dirty trick."

"Yes," agreed Hazelrigg, "the Hadji's respect for him will go up enormously."

"Why not stay inside? Stop here till the end. Why not stay here till the relief comes."

"Because I can do more good outside. Besides," he grinned, "the relief may not come at all, my son. I am not going to be bottled up here and done in, along with you."

"In fact, you mean me to have the credit of defending the place, eh? Noble in failure and glorious in death—or a brilliant success, eh? Whitewashed either way," laughed Wendover.

"Gold-washed," corrected Hazelrigg.

"No, that's not it. Not a bit of it," he continued. "Don't flatter yourself that I'm considering you in the least. You keep the works going here until I have brought off the job outside," and turning away, he

crossed the courtyard of the Fort to the entrance of the corner tower in which the Officers' Quarters were situated.

§ 3

Meanwhile, Breckinge, in a state of terror and panic bordering upon insanity, sat shaking and trembling as he avoided the fierce accusing eye of the gaunt giant who stood over him, his face, attitude and every movement a threat.

He remembered the brute now, the Pathan orderly whose outburst at the trial had amused him, had given him the satisfaction of knowing that the one witness for the defence had done the accused man more harm than good. Instead of doing his utmost to convince the Court that his master had never drunk to excess in all the years that he had known him, the best the jungly clown could do was to promise to murder witnesses for the prosecution.

Yes, a terrible and truculent ruffian and, like all Pathans, neither a respecter of persons nor of the sanctity of human life. No, a savage who would kill a man as willingly as he would an insect.

Had they left him here intentionally, to be his executioner as well as his gaoler? And of course he was armed. He could have half a dozen daggers and a Khyber knife under all that loose clothing . . . And after all, would that not be the best way out of it?

Death. What other way was there but death?

For he was caught . . . caught . . . caught.

These dogs of Native Officers had turned against him to save their own black hides.

And to curry favour with this man, Hazelrigg, in the hope of saving themselves, they'd implicate any of the other false-witnesses who were at Ubele and had not been killed here. They'd all hang together against him, and blame him. Say he had made them do it; and they had obeyed because he was the Doctor Sahib and they supposed he knew best. That sort of lying evasion . . .

And that she-devil Azizun. What had she told Hazelrigg? What *hadn't* she told him? What a fool he had been. What a mad fool to trust a dancing-girl, a *dasi*; to lay himself open to blackmail by a bazaar-woman; to let a creature like that know anything against him.

And how had this devil of a Hazelrigg got hold of her? It looked as though he himself wasn't above spending his time in the bazaar, too. But how could a white man become a *habitué* of Azizun's house, become sufficiently intimate with her to find out things like that? But doubtless he was one of those supermen, Secret Service marvels, who could pass as an Indian among natives, although pure European. Well, obviously he could, for he had not only taken-in him, Breckinge, as Ghulam Hyder the Pathan, but obviously he had fooled the Pathans themselves.

Yes, he must have frequented Azizun's house in the guise of a rich Afghan horse-dealer, a Turkoman carpet-merchant, an Arab pearl-broker, or something of that sort; and bought information from her; or perhaps frightened her by disclosing himself as an agent of the Sirkar, a policeman, or C.I.D. chief, or something of the kind.

Anyhow, he knew, obviously he knew, about Abdul

Ghaffar, whose death in her house had caused the big scandal.

God alone knew what he hadn't found out.

He must be the Devil himself

Doubtless he had handled her as he had these damned Native Officers ; shown how much he knew or professed to know ; and got further confessions from her by a mixture of threats and promises ; so that, between fear and hope, she had told him, partly intentionally and partly unintentionally, all he wanted to know.

Still, who was going to believe the word of a bazaar woman, a notorious *dasi* ?

No, but she could give him information that he could use, and by means of which he could get all the evidence he wanted, without any reference to its tainted source.

Yes, Azizun had evidently told Hazelrigg that she had drugged Abdul Ghaffar in order to get his famous pearl-bag, and had sworn, what was quite true, that she hadn't had the faintest intention of killing him. As she would point out to Hazelrigg, why should she ? She didn't want a terrible scandal, the Police in the place, and the risk of a gaol sentence, not to mention a rope.

And evidently she had told Hazelrigg what they had put in Abdul Ghaffar's cups of coffee, and had also told him the name of the man from whom she had obtained it. She'd point out that the fact that she was innocent of any intention to kill the man was quite obvious from the fact that she had asked Breckinge for some drug that would render Abdul Ghaffar completely insensible without killing him.

Then Hazelrigg had put two and two together, and jumped to the conclusion that the same thing had happened to Wendover. Which it had. Only that

in Wendover's case the drug had been carefully administered in the proper doses. Nor would clods like these military people on Courts-Martial ever understand that the whole thing was research, scientific experiment, the testing of most important theories by an authority on toxicology, who was devoting his life to the study of the action of combinations of poisons and narcotics.

Then Hazelrigg had bluffed the Subedar-Major into the belief that he, Breckinge, had made full confession, and that the Subedar-Major's one chance of pardon, or at any rate of amelioration of his position and mitigation of his sentence, would be to speak the truth and add his confession to that of Breckinge his confederate.

That was it.

And even suppose he got off on that charge; suppose, however strong suspicion might be, he was not found guilty—because no one had seen him introduce the drug either into Azizun's house or into Wendover's cooking-pot when he was inspecting the Ubele kitchen—there was quite enough to ruin him utterly in this Fort business, where undeniably Hazelrigg had fairly caught him.

He had obviously talked with Breckinge's messenger, and got evidence of Breckinge making private and personal overtures to the enemy; and he himself had received Breckinge's own agreement to surrender, and his own assertion that he had the power to make the Native Officers follow his example.

No, he hadn't a chance, and this last charge would weigh heavily against him with a Court-Martial that was considering the question of his guilt in the matter of Wendover at Ubele.

And then the death of Abdul Ghaffar at Madrutta. Why, that might be a hanging matter ; and certainly the drugging of his superior officer, followed by his charge—and his medical evidence—of drunkenness, would be a gaol matter.

And now this last ? Surely that might be a shooting matter. High treason or something of the sort. No, probably not that. But they shot men for cowardice in the face of the enemy in time of war.

But no, no ; his fears were getting the better of his common sense. He wasn't a combatant Officer, and they couldn't punish him with anything more than dismissal, for abandoning the sick and wounded, could they ?

But oh, the awful publicity, disgrace and shame. It would mean utter ruin.

Only dismissal ! Better death than the unthinkable degradation of that. His name a by-word. It would be the worst case ever known in the . . . No, unthinkable. Better death.

Death. Yes. That was the real escape. Sudden, swift and painless.

And it would fool them, too. No proof that Wendover was innocent.

Death. Yes. What about the sort of dose that Abdul Ghaffar had had ? And then sleep ; prompt, painless oblivion ; and no waking. Overdose of a sleeping draught, really.

And suppose he did wake ? But he wouldn't. He had experimented fully enough to make sure of that. It was the fool Azizun's own fault that Abdul Ghaffar had died in her house. If she had done what he had told her, "followed the directions on the bottle," in

short, Abdul Ghaffar would have awakened after thirty-six or forty-eight hours of apparently drunken coma, none the worse, except for a head and a mouth and a hang-over.

And the dose he had given Wendover had been absolutely accurate. It had acted perfectly. Suppose he gave himself double that dose; there would be no fear of waking, nor would there be any pain.

That was it, escape.

He'd escape them yet, himself unpunished; and themselves no better off. For nothing could really exonerate Wendover, except Breckinge's own confession. Their case would fall to the ground if they attempted to bring it and win it on the strength of the evidence of the Subedar-Major and his relatives.

For after all, they could prove nothing; they knew nothing; no one saw him do it; and all they could say would be lies . . . lies . . . lies . . .

And suddenly, to the surprise of the stolid Shere Khan, the unbalanced tortured man struck his forehead violently with his fist.

Fool that he was! Fool, fool, in his fool's Paradise.

Where was he to get the drugs he wanted? Why hadn't he brought a supply of *tafu* and *dhatūra* with him?

But whoever would have supposed that he would have wanted it here in Giltraza when, so far as he knew, he hadn't an enemy in the world, and war was the last thing of which anyone thought? How was he to suppose that he should ever be contemplating suicide?

But there were other things. There were other things, painless and swift. Cyanide of potassium;

there was a stock of that, thanks to photographic work. There was some morphia.

He rose to his feet.

"I want to go to my other room. Dispensary," he said in Hindustani.

"Doubtless," sneered Shere Khan.

And the smile and the tone of his voice left no doubt as to his meaning.

"I must go to the '*ispital*.'"

"Doubtless," agreed Shere Khan. "Doubtless you will, before long. To the *ispital*. Then to the gaol. Then to the gallows."

Was this why they had left the ruffian here—to watch him, because they feared he might commit suicide? Would they prevent him? Would they deliberately keep him alive?

The devilish cunning; the brutality!

"Go and tell the Major Sahib I wish to speak to him."

"Anything else?" enquired Shere Khan.

"Didn't you hear the Major Sahib say he wished me to speak to him when I was ready."

"O, *Sipahi*!" called Shere Khan, "*ither ao*," and as the sentry opened the door, bade him give salaams to the Major Sahib and tell him that the Doctor Sahib wished to speak to him.

CHAPTER IV

AS Hazelrigg entered Breckinge's room, he found Shere Khan standing with folded arms ; smiling still, and still unpleasantly, as he regarded the cowering figure of the man who had so grievously injured his friend and master, and about whose throat his sinewy hands were itching to close.

" Well, Breckinge," said Hazelrigg coldly. " You want to speak to me? "

" Yes, Sir. Send this man away," replied Breckinge.

Hazelrigg bade Shere Khan join Wendover, whom he would find near the gate.

" Are you going to take my advice and do the only possible thing, Breckinge? " Hazelrigg enquired as the door closed.

" What about? What about? " gabbled Breckinge, gnawing at the knuckle of his forefinger like a dog at a bone. " You accuse me of surrendering this Fort when I am only the doctor attached to the garrison. You bring a ridiculous charge against me about being concerned in the death of some wretched Arab in a Madrutta brothel. You say that, years ago, I was responsible for Wendover being found drunk. Man! Didn't Colonel Maldon find him? . . . Didn't he have a fair trial, I say, man? I am ill, I tell you, I'm ill. I want to go and get some medicine."

"I don't wonder you're ill, Breckinge, and I don't doubt you'd like to go and get some medicine. I can quite understand that you'd like to take some of the 'medicine' that you've given to other people, including Abdul Ghaffar and Captain Wendover."

"I tell you I . . ."

"Yes, and I'm telling you something. You are going to take your medicine all right, but I'm going to administer it. If you don't like it, there's one way in which you can avoid it. And that is, write a confession of what you did at Ubele."

"Confession of what I did at Ubele? What do you mean?"

"Don't be a fool, Breckinge—and don't waste time. I'm in a hurry. Now pull yourself together and concentrate on this. Get it clearly in your mind. If I leave this Fort without your confession, nothing on earth can save you from a long sentence of penal servitude, or worse—if hanging is worse than penal servitude. It's a matter of taste. Personally I'd sooner be dead than in prison for life."

"Dead. Dead. Yes, *dead*!" shouted Breckinge hysterically. "And that's what I want to be."

"No doubt. But you are not going to be, until I have your statement, or until you have faced a Court-Martial. And you know what that'll mean."

"Major, I . . ." began Breckinge, and to Hazelrigg's astonishment, burst not only into tears but a torrent of Hindustani, an impassioned appeal for mercy, couched in the language of his childhood, of his mother, of his sweeper grandmother; a reversion to type indeed.

Hazelrigg, his thoughts upon the devilishly cruel

deed that had ruined the life of his friend, eyed him unmoved.

"Mercy!" he said, as the prayer ended in a sob. "What mercy had you on a man whose boots you weren't fit to clean? What mercy had you on the wretched Abdul Ghaffar? And on the woman Amelie Pereira, the Eurasian nurse-probationer whom you got into trouble when you were House Surgeon at the Dufferin in Madrutta?"

Quickly Breckinge looked up, as his jaw fell.

What was this? What *didn't* this devil know?

"She died, didn't she? Under your medical care. Died in her sleep. Like Abdul Ghaffar did. Yes—your little friend Nurse-Probationer Pereira was going to have a baby. So she died, eh, Breckinge?"

"Major," whispered Breckinge hoarsely, "let me die, too, I beg you, implore you, *let me die!*"

"I haven't the slightest objection to your dying. In fact, I think you'd be far better dead. But you don't die, unless it's on the gallows, until you've admitted that you drugged Captain Wendover."

"Major, I admit it. I admit it. *I did give him a drug*, a very, very clever . . ."

"Why did you do it?"

"Because I hated him, damn him! Who's *he*, that he should be so superior? Who am *I* that he should despise me? Why was he always finding fault with me?"

"Probably because you gave him cause. But there's more to it than that. Nobody—not even your sort—does a thing like that because fault is found with him."

"He treated me like dirt, I tell you. Always so

superior. Half the time, you'd think I wasn't there. You'd think I was mud. Who was he to look down on me? And he stole my girl! She loved me till he came. Then she looked down on me—as he did. Who were they to look down on me? *My grandfather was a British General.*"

"Yes? I should think he's proud of you."

Hazelrigg's hard streak was definitely in evidence.

"Grandson of a British General, eh? Well, pull yourself together and act accordingly. You've lived like a reptile—now see if you can't die like a man, since you are talking about dying. Do the decent thing by Wendover, and then die if you want to. Die like the grandson of a British General, since you are one!"

"Let me die! Let me die!" moaned the broken half-demented wretch again.

"Believe me, Breckinge, I shan't hinder you, once you've made what amends you can. You wouldn't die without doing that, would you—you . . . *you General's grandson?*"

"You'd use the confession. You'd use it against me."

"Of course I should use it. What do you think? But that needn't worry you. You'd know nothing about it."

"My name . . . my reputation . . ."

"Well, what price those, when it comes to being Court-Martialled for desertion of your sick; for cowardice, and for treason; and then tried by a civil court for murder? What about your reputation then, Breckinge?"

"Let me die," moaned Breckinge, and there was

that in his voice which showed Hazelrigg that he had won.

"Got any writing materials here?" he asked quickly.

"There are some temperature-charts in that *yak-dan*."

"Pen and ink?"

"Here's an indelible pencil," replied Breckinge sullenly, fumbling in the breast pocket of his tunic.

"Get a chart. One'll be enough."

Breckinge obeyed.

"Now then, write as I dictate. Head it *Giltraza Fort* and the date. Write this—and write small:

"I, Captain Alexander Breckinge I.M.S. do hereby fully and freely confess that I introduced a drug into Captain Wendover's food at Ubele Fori, thereby rendering him unconscious, and apparently drunk, for about twenty-four hours. He was found in this condition by Colonel Maldon, Court-Martialed, found guilty and cashiered. I gave evidence that he was in the habit of drinking to excess, and I suborned the Native Officers of the garrison to give similar evidence, all of which was entirely false. I never knew Captain Wendover to drink alcohol except in extreme moderation, and I never heard of his doing so. I never saw him drink, even at meal times; and it is my sincere belief that he drank only one peg of whisky, as a pick-me-up, each night. He is wholly innocent of the charge that was brought against him, and I alone am responsible for the condition in which he was found.

"That's about what we want," observed Hazelrigg. "Let me read it . . . Yes, that meets the case, I think. Now we'll have your signature witnessed."

And calling to the sentry, Hazelrigg bade him give

his salaams to the Subedar-Major Saheb and tell the Pathan that the Major Sahib wanted him.

Should he also send for Wendover and give him his great moment of complete triumph? No. It should not be said that Wendover had any hand in the obtaining of this confession, and Wendover wasn't of the type that takes much stock in great moments of complete triumph.

In fact, he rather gave the impression of a man who had completely finished with triumphs, was indifferent to the opinion in which he was held by his world, and careless as to his fate and future.

Out of that calm indifference, not to say dull apathy, he must be stirred—for it was unnatural, deliberately cultivated.

Nevertheless he would not send for him now; and when the time arrived to bid him triumph, he should find it to be a time when all men, while deeply sympathizing with him and deploring his cruel fate, proclaimed him a hero; admiring his fortitude under adversity and his courage in time of trial. And if he died in the defence of this Fort, as well he might, to prove him innocent and rehabilitate his memory should be one of the main objects of Hazelrigg's life.

The Subedar-Major, followed by Shere Khan, entered.

"I want you to hear me read this confession, for two reasons, Subedar-Major Saheb," he said. "First because I wish you to witness its signature, and second because it will give you a good idea of the sort of form in which your own confession should be written—if I require you to write one. Understand me?"

"*Han*, Sahib," mumbled the Subedar-Major.

"Listen then," and first in English and then in Hindustani, Hazelrigg read the document.

"Sign it please, Breckinge, with your usual signature, and then write, underneath, your full name and rank, Alexander Breckinge, Captain I.M.S., in case your signature is of the illegible variety.

"Now write at the bottom left-hand corner here, '*Signed in the presence of . . .*'

"Now, Subedar-Major, your signature."

And with a few scratches made from right to left, the Subedar-Major signed his name in Hindustani characters.

"Now, Shere Khan, I want you to witness this. You've heard it in English, and now I'll read it in Pushtu," he continued, and proceeded to do so. Whereafter Shere Khan, writing also from right to left, made the hieroglyphics which represented his name.

"That'll do, thank you, Subedar-Major. I'll talk to you on this matter again later. You have my permission to go.

"Now then, Breckinge," he said, turning to where the Eurasian rested his head upon hands that covered his face, "You said just now that you wished to die. You've my full permission to die, how and when you like, and I shall take no steps to restrain you from doing so.

"In the completest certainty," he added, "that you will do nothing of the sort. Not you.

"Now then. You've made what little reparation can be made in the matter of Captain Wendover. See if you can make some in the matter of your conduct here as a responsible member of this garrison. Do your

utmost for the sick and wounded, and don't forget that an important part of your duty is to do what you can to keep up the spirits of those who are still able to fight. A good report on your behaviour is the one thing that may dispose me to do what I can in your favour when the time comes."

"And what can you do?" groaned Breckinge. "If you produce that confession I'm done for, am I not?"

"You are, undoubtedly. But I could choose whether I would bring charges against you which would probably result in your being hanged or sent to penal servitude for life; or whether, on the other hand, I should bring such charges against you as would result merely in your being cashiered—as Wendover was.

"It's up to you, Breckinge. You can either make me the most bitterly relentless enemy, utterly vindictive and implacable; or you can make me a prosecutor disposed to let the accused down as lightly as possible in the circumstances, and to recommend him to mercy.

"And I can assure you that there will be a wonderful difference between the effect of the two attitudes."

Turning on his heel, Hazelrigg went from the room. As he was about to close the door he looked in again and said:

"Don't forget that you are 'a General's grandson,' Breckinge."

CHAPTER V

A LITTLE later, the gate was cautiously opened, while the garrison anxiously watched for any signs of treachery.

Wah, wah! This was a man, this Major Sahib, who was so *hushyar*, so cunning, that he could utterly befool the *hushyar* and cunning Pathans themselves, masters of strategy, trickery and guile.

With a quiet :

"*Shahbash, my brothers,*" to the men about the gate, a "*Remember your destiny is in your own hands,*" to the Subedar-Major and—in English—to Wendover :

"So long, old chap. Happy days," Major Hazelrigg, once more the Compleat Pathan, Ghulam Hyder, marched forth, his hands held high, as one who would earnestly draw attention to the fact that there is not the slightest need to shoot him in the back.

Down the track leading from the Fort, he marched, dropped into a trench, scuttled along it, ran crouching behind *sangars* and vanished into the shelter of great rocks.

As he did so, heavy fire was immediately opened from all directions upon the Fort. But its defenders, having expected just that, presented no target.

Making his way to the cave which was the G.H.Q. of the Singing Hādjī of Sufed Kot, Ghulam Hyder requested the watching surly sentry to announce his

return. The sudden burst of fire having already done this, the Hadji appeared upon the spacious platform that stretched before the mouth of his cave to the edge of the *khud*.

"Come hither, oh man," he called, and seated himself cross-legged, his un-sacerdotal rifle athwart his lap.

"*Aré*, where are thy brethren, *ghazi*?" he jeered. "In chains or in Paradise? What has happened?"

"*Tobah! Tobah!*" exclaimed Ghulam Hyder. "Alas, alas! The treacherous Infidel dogs. They have seized them, and they keep them as hostages."

"And what of the rush of the three brave *ghazis* upon the Sahibs? What of the slaughter of all in authority?" sneered the Hadji.

"Hadji Saheb," replied Ghulam Hyder, "who casts his rifle into the river? Who throws his life away for nothing at all? As we entered the gates, with our hands raised, men held their rifles a few feet away from our breasts. To die uselessly and in vain, we had but to move. Then, with men holding fixed bayonets that pricked the skin of my back, and others that held rifles almost touching my sides, I was taken to the room of the Sahib commanding the Fort. What could I do? To move was to die. Men with bayonets behind me, men with loaded rifles beside me, the Sahib with a revolver pointing at my heart. What could I do?"

"What did you do?"

"Fooled him. Gave him untrue answers. Filled his mind with false information."

"Such as?"

"The swift approach of great *lashkars* to join you, Hadji Saheb; of great stores of ammunition and rupees secretly sent to you by the Hadji of Turangzai, by

the Kings of Munza, of Panel, of Mandol, of Putistan, of Mazristan, of regiments of the Ben-i-Israel, the fierce Duranis, ordered by the Amir of Afghanistan to march, without his knowledge, to your help."

"It is well," observed the Hadji. "And what of the Fort? Are not the garrison all *pasmandas*¹—those who are not smitten with disease and wounded with our bullets?"

"Heavy is my heart and reluctant is my tongue, Hadji Saheb. But all is even as I told you but yesterday. Their feet are not tired. Behind their walls they are safe. They eat and grow fat. They laugh and sing and dance. While but few are upon the walls, many are making merry or resting below. Nor will they ever surrender."

"And why should they sing and dance when they are ringed about by enemies who will surely slit their throats?"

"Because they have news, Hadji Saheb. News of the approach of British troops."

"And where will they be when the British troops arrive? In Hell."

"Allah grant it, Hadji Saheb; but I fear. And that is not the only news. An army of those thrice-accursed sons of noseless mothers who serve them for gold, those traitors of the Border who undertake to protect the Farungis' roads and keep the Farungis' peace in return for rifles and for money—a *lashkar* of them is coming to attack you."

The fingers that strayed in the Hadji's beard closed upon it in a grip.

"Who are they?" he asked.

¹ *Men with weary feet.*

"They did not tell me, Hadji Saheb, but undoubtedly they have news of them."

"How?"

"By the marvellous and incredible ways of the hell-doomed Infidel. Messages seem to come to them through the air when they have no *tar* wires."

"They are in league with the Devil," growled the Hadji.

"Doubtless."

"Well, what of the other two would-be were-not *ghazis*?"

"Hostages, Hadji Saheb. Should you assault the place again, they will hang them from the gate-tower."

"And thus will they obtain Paradise—perchance," observed the Hadji. "You have my permission to go. I will send for you later, and we will talk again."

Salaaming, Ghulam Hyder departed in search of others of the band whom he had led to the support of the *jehad* of the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot.

As they huddled together about a cooking-pot, Ghulam Hyder conversed in whispers with a man, known elsewhere and at other times as Mahbub Ali, prominent and invaluable ornament of the Secret Service and past-master player of the Great Game.

"Well, that would make about twenty rifles in all, wouldn't it?" observed Ghulam Hyder. "Not enough really to make a useful diversion."

"No," agreed Mahbub Ali. "They couldn't do much in the way of an attack on the besieging force, but they might create a very useful distraction in the middle of a fight . . . Suppose I led them, with the other attackers, when an assault was being made on

the great gate, and then suddenly we started shooting our poor brethren. It would throw that particular party into some slight confusion ! ”

“ Yes. Done in the right way at the right moment, it might do some good. Might save the gate from being burned down, for example,” agreed Ghulam Hyder. “ But it would be almost certain death for the lot of you and . . . ”

“ And it is a game that can be played only once, of course. But our lives would be cheap at the price of the Fort,” said Mahbub Ali.

Ghulam Hyder thought a while.

“ No,” he said at length. “ I think we will scatter. All go in different directions, but generally east by south, each with a message and big promises to any Khan who might be useful, and bring a band of men. They know the Relief Force has reached the Tangit Pass. Gather them all together. And if they did nothing else, they’d look like an enemy *lashkar* coming.”

“ Yes, they would, especially when some of our people came in, one by one, and announced them to the Hadji as such.”

“ That’s it. Then, when you send me word that a fair number have gathered together, I can come and talk to them, making promises of the benevolence of the Sirkar and the impossibility of the success of the Hadji, and get them to elect a leader.”

“ The Khan of Khairastan,” observed Mahbub Ali.

“ Yes, he should be here soon,” agreed Ghulam Hyder. “ Go you yourself and urge him on, Mahbub Ali. If his men and those of his confederation arrive secretly and in time, and make sudden onslaught while the Hadji is attacking the Fort, it would be well.”

"Yes, very well," agreed Mahbub Ali. "The Hadji's men are getting discouraged. Much was hoped of you and the other two *ghazis*," he smiled, stroking his red beard, "and you have returned alone, with nothing accomplished. Now there will be no on-fall while the garrison is in utter confusion following upon the slaying of their leaders by the fanatical *ghazis*!"

Both men laughed.

Ghulam Hyder produced a *biddi* from beneath the side of his turban, lit it with an ember of the cooking-fire, placed it between the outer sides of his cupped hands, so that it projected where the bases of the little fingers met, and inhaled the smoke from between his thumbs in approved native fashion.

"Yes," he agreed, emitting a cloud of the stinking acrid smoke which always reminded him of his earliest days of vice when he smoked China tea in a pipe made with an acorn-cup and a straw; cigarettes of brown paper and dried clover; yea, of newspaper and boot-lace—possibly a useful early initiation that stood him in good stead now, for but few Europeans can smoke the *biddi* in native style and with every evidence of appreciation of its undeniably peculiar and powerful flavour.

"Yes. I think the good Hadji is feeling depressed with what he knows of his losses, and what I've told him of the state of affairs inside the Fort."

"Natheless, he will make one more assault upon the place, I suppose, before he raises the siege," observed Mahbub Ali.

"I expect so. I'm afraid so," replied Ghulam Hyder. "I'm going to stay here for a while and do my best to discourage him, and to give any warning

and information that I can to the Captain Sahib. I wish I could be in two places at once, Mahbub Ali, but I can do the next best thing—be in one place and send thee to the other. Soon I must go down to the Pass.”

Mahbub Ali smiled.

“I will bring those who wish to help the Sirkar if the Sirkar is winning; and as quickly as it can be done,” he said.

“If it can be done thou wilt do it,” agreed Ghulam Hyder. “Start at once. In the direction of Khairastan.”

“And meeting them on the way,” said Mahbub Ali, rising to his feet, “I will tell the Khan of Khairastan that his beloved son is now besieged in Giltraza Fort, and should he wish ever to look upon his face again, he must indeed hasten. That will make the lazy old devil hurry his weary feet.”

CHAPTER VI

AND with a speed incredible to those who have had no experience of the rapidity with which the spirit of the Oriental will rise with the hope and promise of success, and sink with the appearance and threat of failure, the mental attitudes respectively of besiegers and besieged underwent a change.

Within the Fort, the difference in the psychological atmosphere was almost as marked as that in the physical at the rising of the sun. The health of almost all improved. The general cast of countenance changed from morose gloom to smiling cheerfulness. The backs of weary men straightened almost visibly, their shoulders squared, their chests protruded.

As always, with the personnel of an Eastern force, the spirit of the leader was the spirit of the men ; and that of the new Commandant of Giltraza Fort was one, not so much of hope, as of certainty, of victory ; one of calm and confident self-reliance, and of belief in the worth and worthiness of his sepoys. Tireless, ubiquitous, strong, he never seemed to sleep ; and every man felt that the eye of his Commander was upon him ; that he was at his side ; that he knew not only what the soldier did, but what he thought ; that while he commanded them, led them, disciplined them, watched over them, thought for them, fought for them and with them, they could not and would not be defeated.

This was a Sahib. This was a man. And victory would be theirs. Of his tireless energy it was as though he gave every man a share.

And even the soul of Breckinge could scarce forbear to cheer, his mind forbear to admire and to approve. Cursing him, he yet wished that he could have been such a man as this. Was it his fault that he had sweeper blood? "*Is it my fault that I am a da Sousa's son*"? Damn and curse and smite and blast Wendover, for the English Sahib that he was.

Breckinge, after one brief interview, Wendover treated as he would have done any other Medical Officer attached to the garrison.

Immediately after the departure of Hazelrigg, he had entered Breckinge's room.

"Look here, Breckinge," he said. "We are in the same boat—again. Let's pull together so long as it floats. Do your damndest for the sick and wounded, and I'll do mine for the others. While the siege lasts, at any rate, let bygones be bygones. Until we are scuppered or relieved, let us absolutely forget anything but the defence of this Fort and—er—start from scratch, what?"

"I shall do my best," replied Breckinge sullenly.

"Good. I'm sure you will."

"What's this about my being under arrest?"

"Nothing. I want you to carry on. With an absolutely free hand. Back me up, Breckinge, and—we'll talk again later."

Breckinge gazed sullenly at the ground.

"Come on, man. Here . . ."

And Wendover held out his hand.

Breckinge looked at it.

"Is there any need for heroics?" he growled, thrusting his hands into the side pockets of his tunic.

"None whatever, Breckinge," replied Wendover, eyeing him coldly. "As you please."

"As you please," he said again. "Carry on. You are not under arrest, open or close. Do your best. Outside the hospital as well as in. Do your damndest and play the game; and I shall be—grateful."

"But," he added, as he turned to go, "if you don't, and you make trouble again, I'll shoot you myself, Breckinge. See?"

§ 2

For a time the siege continued monotonously, a weary round of routine duty, anxious watchfulness and slow but steady losses on the part of the garrison.

But suddenly this state of affairs was changed.

It was evident that something had galvanized the besiegers into renewed activity; probably, as Wendover hoped and tried to believe, the approach of a British relieving-force, or of a Pathan *lashkar* of doubtful intentions and yet more doubtful cordiality towards the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot.

In addition to heavy morning and evening shooting, the daily volume of sniping fire increased, and there were evidences of a projected attack which was to be pushed home.

The moonless nights, which had hitherto been reasonably quiet, were now times of great activity, and each day's dawn saw a new *sangar* constructed during the hours of darkness; and each new *sangar* was nearer to the Fort.

One morning, the new *sangar* of the previous night was immediately opposite the main gates of the Fort ; and evidently a considerable number of men must have worked with enthusiastic vigour, for this latest field-fortification was more of a redoubt than a mere *sangar* of piled boulders and stones.

From the fact that nothing whatsoever could be seen of the men who manned it, Wendover decided that there had been a busy night of digging as well as of stone-carrying and building.

Why should this new field-work be so big and strong and sited exactly where it was ?

Very much more commodious than other *sangars* and trenches, it still could not be big enough to serve as the assembly-point for a large assaulting force ; nor, armed as they were with excellent rifles, did the besiegers gain much, from the shooting point of view, by having this post a few yards nearer to the Fort.

What was the game ?

It did not take Wendover long to decide ; but he kept his counsel. There was no need to publish his conclusion and spread despondency and alarm a minute earlier than was inevitable.

It was thus with no surprise, but considerable mis-giving, anxiety and doubt, that he received a report one morning from Havildar Umrao Singh that, during the night, there had been curious and inexplicable sounds ; sounds that " came from nowhere "—in other words from a source and direction unidentifiable by the listeners.

That night Wendover heard the unmistakable noises of subterranean digging ; and, lying prone with his ear

to the ground, knew that his suspicions had been justified. The enemy was mining the main gate of the Fort, tunnelling from the new redoubt, and had almost reached their objective.

At any time now, a mine might be placed and exploded beneath their feet.

§ 3

Wendover decided that there was but one thing to be done.

They must make a sortie.

It was the only chance of saving the gate, and it was a poor chance.

Oh, for a half-company of fierce Gurkhas who would charge, *kukri* in hand. They'd go through that mob like a knife through butter, and hunt them back to their trenches. Oh, for fifty fighting Sikhs, burly, dour and determined. They'd show the Pathan something with the bayonet. Let him see how the Khyber knife stood up to that.

But these men were different. They had their virtues, undeniably, and they'd improved a lot recently, but there was no doubt about it, the Pathan had put their tails down for them, and man for man, they were inferior in strength and skill, if not in courage. Still, he could probably pick a score or so who would put up a good show; and undoubtedly Havildar Umrao Singh and his Section would acquit themselves like men; be almost as good as Ghurkas, Sikhs, Baluchis or Punjabi Mahommedans, and set an example to the rest.

It would be a bit of a forlorn hope, and they'd

probably lose heavily ; but the alternative was losing the Fort and everything else.

What about the Native Officers ?

Better leave the Subedar-Major inside, in case anything happened to himself. After all, he was the most experienced soldier there ; and he had learned his lesson. There'd be no more talk of surrender. Besides, he wasn't really equal to a physical rough-and-tumble, after a smart sprint. No, he'd have to stay inside. And his brother, Subedar Gopal Mangal ? He should come. Give him a chance to distinguish himself and to set an example.

Yes, he'd take Subedar Gopal Mangal and Havildar Umrao Singh—those two good *naiks*—and a party of selected men, beginning with Umrao Singh's lot.

Hurrying, crouching, along the *banquette*, he found the Subedar-Major.

" I'm going to make a sortie, Subedar-Major," he said, " with the best and strongest of the men. If I don't come back, my instructions are, of course, *Carry on*. You will be in sole command—and responsible. Understand ? Make no mistake about it, then. The relief force will be here before long. Let them find everything all right—and you will be a famous man. It's a chance that doesn't come to many soldiers, Subedar-Major . . . I am going to take Subedar Gopal Mangal and Havildar Umrao Singh and the best of the men. Most of them will come back, of course. Don't spare ammunition, until we are well into them. There will be a good chance to give it them hot, as we charge, for they'll be attending to us, and not firing at the loop-holes and embrasures. So back us up well."

Sending for Subedar Gopal Mangal and Havildar

Umrao Singh who was in charge of the in-lying picket, he bade them quickly pick the best of the men, the strongest and the healthiest, and those with the best stomach for hand-to-hand fighting, to parade at once at the western postern, from which they were to pull away the buttressing baulks of timber and big stones that closed it.

He then went to the hospital and called the doctor to the door.

"Going to make a sortie, Breckinge," he said. "Bound to be a rush of wounded. Make what preparations you can for them here; and get some stretchers down to the west postern, with half a dozen good men who can make themselves useful with any of the badly wounded we can lug away with us. You will know just what to do, won't you?"

Presumably silence gave consent, since Breckinge made no reply.

Wendover eyed him coldly, and then glanced at his borrowed wrist-watch.

"I shall open the postern in fifteen minutes, and probably the survivors will be back in ten more, walking wounded in less."

"And by the way," he added, ere he closed the hospital door, "Subedar-Major Ganga Charan will be in sole and responsible command, if I don't come back. Hearten him up all you possibly can. And the men as well. The Relief Force must be almost here."

And turning, he clattered down the rough wooden stairway, out across the courtyard and through the main building of the Fort to the little door in the western wall. Here, a working party was pulling away the materials of its temporary walling-up.

The work completed, Wendover bade the men fall in. He then divided them into two parties, the larger one under the Subedar, the other, a quarter the number, under the Havildar, and gave brief clear instructions. They were to file out through the postern, follow him round the wall and, having arrived at the corner from which the attackers of the main gate would be in view, were swiftly to extend and, at his signal, advance at the double.

As soon as they were seen and the redoubt-party turned to meet them, he would shout the order to charge, and they would do so with all their might. No rifle was to be fired. They had not come from behind their defences to shoot in the open. They were to charge the new *sangar* or redoubt, drive the enemy from it, and well beyond it, then retire to the redoubt and defend it until he gave the word to retire.

Once they were into the redoubt, Subedar Gopal Mangal and his party were to keep up as heavy a fire as they could, to prevent the re-capture of the place.

Meanwhile, Havildar Umrao Singh and his party were to follow Wendover into the tunnel, and deal with the men who were mining. That would be bayonet work. As soon as he had placed the bags of gunpowder, fired the fuse and come out of the mine, the whole sortie-party would run as hard as they could back to the Fort, round the wall, and in at the postern door. Any man who was badly hit and could walk or crawl, was to get back to the Fort at once.

Having described the operation as simply and succinctly as he could, Wendover repeated his orders, and then bade Subedar Gopal Mangal describe exactly what his duties were.

It was plain that he quite understood that his business was to clear the redoubt, drive the enemy out, and keep them out while the others dealt with the mine itself.

Wendover then made sure that Havildar Umrao Singh understood what he had to do. Yes, he was to charge with his men, help bayonet the Pathans out of the redoubt, and when this was done and the rest of the party maintaining rapid fire, he and his men were to help the Captain Sahib to clear the tunnel of its occupants, so that he could place his charge and light the fuse.

That being done and the order being given to retire, he and his men would join the Subedar's party in a swift rush back to the Fort.

That was it. And speed would be everything. It must be a surprise attack. Within a minute of sighting the sortie party, the Pathans in the redoubt must be running for their lives, and the heavy fire of rapid-independent must prevent their return with reinforcements, until the work in the tunnel was completed.

Being satisfied that he had done all he could in the way of preliminary, Wendover bade the Subedar see that magazines were charged and cut-offs closed, and that no man had a cartridge in the chamber of his rifle, and that, with bayonets fixed, everything was ready for the party to leave the Fort.

He then hurried to the ammunition-magazine and taking a long hose-like roll of fuse, hung it round his neck, hoisted a fifty pound bag of powder on to his left shoulder and clasped another beneath his right arm.

But that would put him out of action, as far as fighting was concerned. He ought to have his revolver-

hand free . . . What about giving one of the bags to Havildar Umrao Singh and telling him to stick close to him? No, he had better leave him to look after the mine party. He'd give one of the bags to a selected sepoy. Better still—to Shere Khan, who would never forgive him if he left him out of such a lovely scrap as this promised to be.

Yes, he had better be in a position to use his revolver. Might make all the difference to the success of the somewhat forlorn hope, as the sortie would probably fail if he were killed. And there would certainly be some hand-to-hand rough-housing before they got the redoubt and tunnel to themselves. Silly—to be unable to defend himself, at any rate until the redoubt was cleared . . .

Returning to the postern, he found that everything was ready, the men with bayonets fixed, and the postern unfastened. To Shere Khan he gave one of the bags of powder and instructions to stick to him closer than a brother sticketh. Also to get a couple of the oil-soaked pine-flares that had been provided for emergency illuminations.

“Now then,” he said in Hindustani, “who’s going to win the Order of Merit? Come on.”

And pulling open the gate he led the way.

Glancing back as he reached the south-west corner, he saw that the Subedar and Havildar were behind him, and the men in double file were following them closely.

It looked a pitifully small party to undertake so big a venture.

What a curiously exposed and naked feeling one had, here, outside the walls; and how much stranger

it must seem to the rest, to find themselves outside after so many long weeks of confinement ; for they had been cooped up in there three times as long as he had.

The very air seemed freer and fresher.

Of course it did. They were away from the appalling stench. That was probably what caused the wonderful difference.

How long the wall seemed.

Apparently they had not been observed from the southern side at all. Doubtless the attention of the whole Pathan force was concentrated on the main gate and the eastern side of the Fort.

He reached the south-eastern corner.

Now for it !

Turning to the little column behind him, he gave a signal to right turn into line. To left wheel. To extend. To double.

To Wendover's delight, the sepoy's obeyed coolly and steadily, and the whole party was advancing in good order at a steady run before the enemy appeared to realize what was happening.

Suddenly there were loud shouts from the redoubt, heads appeared, men in incredulous astonishment exposed themselves recklessly.

"*Ch-a-a-a-r-ge,*" roared Wendover ; and himself dashed forward, his left hand steadying the heavy bag of powder on his shoulder, his right extended, pointing the way with his revolver.

Now your Pathan, be he Afridi, Mahsud, Mohmand or what not, is as brave as any man alive and, in his own place and manner, as well as in most others, is as good a fighting-man as any in the world.

But we all have our little fancies and dislikes, and

the Pathan dislikes the bayonet. It isn't that, like some stout fighting-men, he has a distaste for cold steel. *Au contraire* his yard-long Khyber knife is his favourite weapon, and he will as soon face it as use it. But determined and deadly as he is at hand-to-hand fighting, he knows nothing of the art of parrying a thrust. With his sword-like knife he cuts and slashes, but does not thrust ; and, being unaccustomed to the receipt of thrusts, has neither needed nor learned to parry one. So that against a well-used rifle-and-bayonet he has no chance. He does not understand it ; he does not like it ; and wisely he considers that the best thing to do with the opponent who uses such an outlandish weapon is to go away from him.

And as, with the greatest *élan*, the charge was pressed home, the defenders of the redoubt went away.

In the opinion of the charging, cheering sepoys, it was defeat, rout, flight. In that of the swiftly departing Pathans it was strategic withdrawal to a place where they could use the proper weapon, the rifle, in a proper manner : though had these khaki-clad servants of the Sirkar suddenly swept down upon them in this impetuous manner, waving Khyber knives, they would have dashed out and met them with Khyber knives and fought them on equal terms—he who got his slash in first being the better and the luckier man . . .

Over the breast-work of the demi-lune redoubt leapt Wendover, his men close behind him ; and immediately all but he, Shere Khan, the Subedar, and the Havildar, flung themselves down behind the dry-stone wall which was very low on the side facing the Pathan position, and opened a heavy fire upon the fleeing and swiftly-disappearing enemy.

After a quick glance round, and seeing that, so far, all was going well, Wendover jumped into the big hole or pit that had been dug in the centre of the redoubt.

Yes, this was the entrance to the mine-shaft.

Taking the powder-bag under his arm, he made his way, crouching low, for some distance along the tunnel, still closely followed by Shere Khan carrying the other bag.

Should he make his way as far along the tunnel as he could go?

No, it would suffice if the explosion took place half-way between the redoubt and the Fort gate. A huge crater would result from the explosion, and the whole long roof of the shallow tunnel would undoubtedly cave in, as the result of the tremendous concussion and vibration. And even if it did not do so right up to the gate, the enemy would have to construct a new redoubt before they could use the small portion that would remain intact.

No, he mustn't go too far. It would be too funny for tears if he himself blew the gate in.

This would do. Dumping the heavy bag and bidding Shere Khan place the other beside it, he began to tamp the hundred-pound charge.

Were there any men working at the end of the tunnel; and, if so, could he deliberately doom them to such a death, to be blown to pieces or buried alive? On the other hand, what were they doing but their very utmost to provide such a fate for the defenders of the gate? As soon as the mine was ready, they would touch it off at some hour of the day or night, when it would result in the greatest loss of human life, with every hope and intention of blowing to pieces and

burying alive beneath the ruins of the tower as many as they could of its defenders.

Still, he needn't accept their standards ; and there was something particularly horrible about the kind of death that would result if his own explosion brought down a length of tunnel in such a way that the workers at the other end were entombed alive. Or if this didn't occur, how horrible nevertheless to lie at the end of that tunnel, in pitch darkness, wounded and bleeding to death for want of help. And probably the men working down there knew nothing of what was happening in the redoubt.

How many of them would there be ? Probably several, working in shifts of two or three, at the ' face.'

As he thought, a man came towards him from the black depths, evidently in a hurry, as he charged along, doubled and crouching like a bear rushing out of its den. Evidently he had gathered that something was wrong, as he held a drawn *tulwar* before him.

At the same moment, behind Wendover, Shere Khan struck three or four matches in a bunch and lit a pine-flare. Wendover fired his revolver and the man fell.

Now they'd come.

There were exclamations ; a sound of pick-axe and spade being thrown aside ; and then a rush.

Waiting until he saw a gleam of white and a flash of steel, Wendover fired. Again. And again.

Having emptied his revolver he threw himself down, took his knife from his belt and slashed the protruding corner of a powder-bag.

" Shoot, if they come, Shere Khan," he said, as he thrust the end of the fuse well into the bag. Having done this, he continued tamping. Opening the corner of the other bag, he worked the end of the second

length of fuse well into the powder, and then coolly continued his tamping work.

If one fuse failed, the other might succeed.

Suddenly Shere Khan's rifle banged, just above his head, making a tremendous din in the enclosed space.

Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that Havildar Umrao Singh, beside and behind Shere Khan, held his rifle at the 'present.'

As Shere Khan worked the bolt of his gun, the Havildar fired.

That surely must have accounted for the occupants of the tunnel. Anyhow, he could wait no longer.

"Get out," he bawled in Hindustani. "Quick. I'm going to fire the mine."

And as Shere Khan, the Havildar and the men behind them turned about and, hurrying from the shaft, climbed out of the pit, Wendover unrolled the two lengths of fuse to their full extent.

Having done so, he dashed from the tunnel and, at a glance, took in the situation.

The enemy were about to attempt the re-capture of the redoubt.

To the Pathans, a charge of yelling devils, each with a gleaming bayonet levelled before him, was one thing ; but a handful of sepoy shooting from behind a low breastwork of rocks was another. They'd soon deal with them. And while a heavy fire was maintained upon the redoubt, a considerable body of Pathans steadily advanced to the assault, making use of cover as only Pathans can. From bush to bush and rock to rock, they crept and wriggled ; each man, while making amazingly swift progress, scarcely offering a target to the quickest sharp-shooter.

And as Wendover was well aware, none of these sepoy would ever shine in the art of taking snap-shots at the "running-man" on the rifle range, much less when under heavy fire themselves.

It was time to go.

Pulling out his whistle, he blew a long-continued blast with all his strength, the agreed signal for retirement, that instantly turned the brave defence into a *sauf qui peut*.

Leaping to their feet, the sepoy ran for their lives, Subedar Gopal Mangal and Havildar Umrao Singh urging them on, and, as Wendover had time to note, bravely doing so until the last man was over the redoubt wall and running, as hard as he could go, towards the south-west corner of the Fort.

Derisive howls, yells and cheers rose from the attacking Pathans who, fortunately for Wendover, instead of leaping up and charging in pursuit, as some troops would have done, sought comfortable rest for their rifles, and fired steadily at the swiftly-disappearing foe.

Splendid. Exactly what he had anticipated, and everything going according to plan. It might possibly have spoilt things had the enemy made a rush for the redoubt, though even then it was hardly likely that, in the excitement of driving the intruders out, any of the Pathans would have entered the tunnel . . .

A minute after emerging from the shaft into the shallow pit, Wendover turned about and dashed back again.

Taking a box of matches from his pocket he struck a small bunch of them and carefully lit first one fuse and then the other. For a moment he watched to see that both were burning satisfactorily.

Yes, all was well, and in another minute the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot would get one of the major surprises of a doubtless surprising life.

Well, it was time for him to go, too, and the sooner the better.

Hurrying from the shaft, he scrambled out of the entrance pit, which was some four feet deep, noted with great satisfaction that not a single sepoy had been too badly wounded to leave the redoubt, sprang over the breast-work, and ran as hard as he could go in the direction of the corner of the Fort, from whose walls loud cheers greeted his appearance . . .

Hullo, that was bad—several men must have been hit while running from the redoubt to the Fort. Bright splashes of blood showed here and there on the grey stones, where wounded men had fallen and lain awhile, ere struggling to their feet and continuing their retreat. Here and there were the bodies of those who had been killed outright, or too badly wounded even to crawl. But this was to be expected, of course. Behind the protecting walls of the redoubt they had been comparatively safe. In the open, running in the direct line of fire between the enemy and the Fort, some were bound to be hit.

Throwing himself down beside the first of these inert bundles of khaki, Wendover saw that the man was dead, a bullet having taken him squarely in the base of the skull.

Scrambling to his feet, Wendover dashed on.

As he ran, bullets struck the ground all round him and he marvelled that he was not hit.

Again throwing himself down, by the next prostrate man. Wendover saw that for him also nothing could

be done, a soft leaden bullet, probably from a Martini-Henry rifle, having entered between his shoulder-blades and made a hideous wound as it mushroomed ere passing out through his chest. If not dead, he was unconscious and quite beyond help.

Again springing up, Wendover dashed on and, after running a few yards, received a violent blow that sent him sprawling, the sensation reminding him of that resultant upon stopping a swift cricket ball with his knee.

Pulling himself together and attempting to rise, he found that this was impossible.

Bad luck . . . Since he had to be hit and knocked out, it was a pity they couldn't either have made a clean job of it, or got him anywhere but in the legs. If they caught him alive, the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot would teach him a lesson. He'd "learn" him to butt in upon his private affairs in the guise of a Pathan, and then thwart his plans, and perhaps bring them all to nought, in the guise of a Sahib.

Better load the old revolver again, and lessen the number of the Fort's assailants by five when they came to gather him in. And keep the last shot for himself. There'd be no harm in that, surely?

That yelling, howling row he had heard as he crashed must have been a roar of triumph from the Pathan trenches and *sangars* when they saw him go down. How many would claim the honour of having winged him, when the Hadji made kind enquiries on the subject? A few score, doubtless. Probably a few hundred.

But . . . What was he forgetting? What had happened? No, he was a bit confused . . . It was

rather a question of what hadn't happened . . . Yes, what hadn't happened ?

Good Lord ! The mine !

The fuse must have failed.

Both of them.

And wasn't it just his luck ? Wasn't it just the devil's own luck that he couldn't go back and re-light them ? If only he had been knocked out with a whack in the body in a non-vital part, he could have got his breath again, pulled himself together, and then made a swift dash back and into the place, before the Pathans guessed what he was up to.

Or if only he could have crawled, he might have managed it. Once he reached the redoubt, he would have been safe from interference. There wasn't a man in the Hadji's army who would have risked, not merely death here, but utter damnation in the Hereafter, by being blown to pieces. It was the one death that the *ghazi* himself feared, knowing full well that it was useless to appear at Heaven's gate in a thousand pieces and ask permission to enter as a good Mussulman.

As these thoughts passed through his mind in a flash, he raised himself on his hands, sat up, turned towards the redoubt, painfully moved his legs, and lay with his face turned to the enemy.

Now then, if he didn't bleed too fast, he could work himself slowly along in the direction of the redoubt, use his hands, forearms, elbows, his knees, his toes, yes, his teeth and his eyebrows, but what he would contrive to edge himself along . . . inch by inch . . . back to the redoubt.

Of course, if the Pathans rushed, there would be an end of the matter, but if they feared a trap, as un-

doubtedly they did, he might last out, might find sufficient strength to drag himself there somehow, fall over the breast-work, roll into the pit, crawl to the fuses, light them again—and then take his chance. Possibly he could crawl away sufficiently far to avoid being himself blown up.

And if the fuses failed again?

Well, damn it all, he'd set fire to the gunpowder itself, "and go to his God like a soldier."

And then—since dear old Ganesh was so determined to reinstate him—he could do it posthumously. He could rehabilitate his memory.

He really hadn't much cared whether he were cleared and re-established, but it would be rather nice to have his memory sweetened.

Yes, doubtless there were a few people, men like Ganesh, who had believed in him, in spite of the evidence; and it would be rather a score for them. Otherwise it didn't matter really. He didn't care a damn for those who had assumed his guilt and loudly condemned him. Not that one could blame them, in view of the fair, impartial and public Court-Martial.

He hadn't made much of his life, and this would be a little compensation. If he had been living like a dog, he'd be dying like a man.

Finish in style.

How the bullets rained round him.

Damn the beggars, they'd get him before he started, if they weren't careful!

Painfully he raised himself slightly from the ground, and stretching his hands as far forward as he could, he seized a slightly projecting stone. Flexing and tensing the muscles of his arms, he drew himself a few

inches forward, tried to use his toes and knees to increase the distance, and found that he could not do so.

That was bad. Was he paralysed from the waist down? Been hit in the spine as well as the legs?

Well, he must manage with his arms. Or perhaps, if he could slew himself round broadside-on to the redoubt, he could roll. Yes, almost certainly he could roll, and thus keep up a steadier and quicker progress than by dragging himself along by means of his hands and arms.

But it was devilishly painful

And suddenly his somewhat scattered wits were for the moment totally paralysed by a terrific, shattering, earth-shaking roar as the powder exploded and a tremendous fountain of smoke, stones and earth rose up into the sky.

Thank God! The fuse had been all right.

As he lay still, with closed eyes and swift laboured breathing, a heavy rain of earth and stones crashed down all about him; and, for a full minute, a great silence fell, as besiegers and besieged stared at the smoking ruin of what had been a redoubt, a tunnel and a mine.

And then tremendous outcries broke forth simultaneously as one side cheered with all the strength of its lungs and the other howled savagely in rage and dismay.

A wave of joy surged through Wendover's mind.

Now nothing mattered much.

God willing, the Fort was saved.

Easily disheartened as are all Orientals, whatever be the temper of their courage and *élan*, the Pathan host would continue the siege but half-heartedly, if at all. This mighty explosion would be the death-knell of their hopes of a sudden victory and slaughter ere the arrival of the relief.

Had they succeeded, they would have slaughtered the survivors, occupied the Fort, repaired it quickly, and garrisoned it with picked men. These would have made a most stout resistance if besieged, while the remainder of the *lashkar* would have harried the British force, cut its communications, destroyed the road before and behind it, immobilized it, weakened it by attack after attack until it was overwhelmed.

Now, between the undefeated, evidently resourceful and courageous garrison on the one hand and the approaching Relief Column on the other, they would feel themselves between the hammer and the anvil.

The Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot would quickly find that nothing fails like failure, and one more Commander would discover the inherent weakness of all heterogeneous forces and of plans that depend for their success upon confederations and alliances.

Well, this was the end of Richard Wendover, and incidentally a damned good one ! Lucky at last—and at the last.

But from another point of view it might not be so good, if they got him alive.

What rotten shooting. They ought to have got him before now. They must be all dithered by the sortie and general misconduct of what should have been a despairing and defeated garrison.

God ! That was a near one. Cut his ear. Bit of a marksman. One or two more from that chap and his troubles would be over. Rather a wonder they didn't make a rush, and either hack him to pieces with their knives or drag him into the nearest trench for future treatment.

Shoot straight, you devils, shoot straight and get it over.

With considerable pain and effort, Wendover raised his body until he was in a sitting position facing the enemy, his hands and straightened arms supporting him.

There you are. You are supposed to be good shots. Can't you hit a sitting man at two hundred? . . . Make a dash for the crater where the redoubt was, and it will be one hundred.

That heavy fire the good fellows were maintaining from the Fort was unfortunate for him, really, keeping most of the Pathans' heads down and spoiling their aim. On the other hand, while the Fort kept up that rate of 'rapid independent,' there would be no rush at him.

Come on, come on. Aim straight, you rotten shots.

Hullo! What the devil! Somebody running. And running towards him, from behind. He must turn round.

That fool Shere Khan coming out to be shot.

And then subconsciously he realized that he had been wondering why Shere Khan had left him to it; and had decided that it must have been because the poor chap was hit. Otherwise Shere Khan most certainly would have come back for his friend when he realized that he hadn't followed the rest into the Fort.

The fool. He'd be hit and then there would be two of them.

And the thin time they'd get when they fell into the hands of the Singing Hadji of Sufed Kot!

Unless he could persuade the Hadji that Shere Khan was a genuine *ghazi* kept as a hostage by the Commandant of the Fort.

But no, the fact of his coming out and trying to rescue his friend would prove that he was a fraud.

As these thoughts passed through his mind, Wendover fell back into a recumbent position, painfully rolled over and raised his head.

Good God in Heaven! What was this?

Breckinge . . .

Had he lost so much blood that he was seeing things? Yes, surely. This must be an hallucination, if ever there was one.

Breckinge? Rushing out from safety to rescue a wounded man under heavy fire? And that man his hated enemy; the man by whose death he stood to save his life—or at any rate, to save himself from the heaviest punishment, from utter irreparable ruin and disgrace.

No, it couldn't be.

The running man checked his pace, slithered, and flung himself down beside Wendover.

Breckinge it undoubtedly was.

"Where are you hit?" he gasped as he fought for breath.

Wendover stared, incredulous.

It *was* Breckinge. There was no possible shadow of doubt.

"Good God, Breckinge! What on earth made you do this? Get back, man, get back at once. Wriggle or crawl or run zigzagging."

"Are you hit in the body?" asked Breckinge.

"No, only the legs. But I can't get up."

Breckinge, recumbent, made swift examination.

"Missed the femoral artery," he said. "Not been bleeding too badly. I'll get you into the Fort before I do anything."

"Get inside yourself, man," replied Wendover. "They'll make a rush in a minute. Especially when they see you trying to get me away. You can't do it."

For reply, Breckinge rose to his feet, seized Wendover about the body beneath the arms, and dragged him several yards in the direction of the Fort, from which came renewed cheers, loud and prolonged, while from the Pathans' position arose howls, shrieks and imprecations and increased volume of fire. All about the two men, sand, earth and stones leapt into life as does the surface of a pond under the assault of a hail-storm.

"Stop it, man," shouted Wendover. "Drop me. Lie down."

And as Breckinge continued to drag him :

"Put me down, I tell you, and run," he urged. "Put me down."

Breckinge obeyed, but only to bend over Wendover, to get his left arm beneath his knees, his right under him, below the shoulders, and with a mighty effort and an output of strength of which Wendover had not supposed him capable, to lift him from the ground and, leaning well back, to totter onward in the direction of the Fort.

"Stop it, Breckinge," begged Wendover again. "Put me down, man. Look, I can do the rest myself . . . I can roll. Run for it. I shall be all right now."

Breckinge, reeling, stumbling, swaying, staggered on.

"Look, Breckinge," said Wendover, "if you must do it, put me down, kneel in front of me, and I'll get on your back, somehow. Give me a pick-a-back. It'll be far easier for you."

"What? And protect my body with yours!" panted Breckinge.

"Rubbish. It would save us both. You could go twice as fast."

A burning pain seared Wendover's dangling arm. They'd get Breckinge in a moment.

It must have been a full minute since he threw himself down beside him.

Well done, the garrison. They were giving the enemy something to think about. But for that really heavy fire, there would have been a charge long ago ; or they would have been hit for a certainty.

Well done, Breckinge !

A few yards more, and they'd reach the corner and be in safety, unless the Pathans, enraged beyond discretion, swarmed out of their trenches and *sangars* and made a rush for them. They certainly weren't showing the spirit they had displayed up to date, and in most of the Frontier shows. Either they were fed-up with the whole business, or none too pleased with the result of the Singing Hadji's prophecies and promises. No, they showed more dash and indifference to death than this when their country was invaded and they were fighting in defence of hearth and home. Even so, and allowing for the tremendous firing from the Fort, he and Breckinge had been amazingly lucky so far and . . .

Crash ! God, that was painful ! It also meant that Breckinge was hit.

Turning himself over, Wendover saw that Breckinge was lying on his face. Yes, the poor chap had stopped one . . . badly. What could he do for him ?

Better turn him over, perhaps.

Edging himself along a few inches, with hand and elbow, Wendover contrived to turn Breckinge on to his back. His dusky face was livid ; greenish ; his

eyelids fluttering ; a stain of blood was spreading over the front of his khaki shirt.

This was the very devil. He could roll himself to safety, but he couldn't move Breckinge.

What an amazing thing for the man to do.

Talk about finishing in style, and a good end to a bad life !

Breckinge opened his eyes.

" Not too bad, I hope, old chap," said Wendover.

" *Shot in the back*," whispered Breckinge. " Oh, my God, *shot in the back*, after all. "

And a bitter sardonic smile showed for a moment upon his face.

" Shot in the back be damned," replied Wendover robustly. " Shot while giving your life for another man. "

" *Shot in the back !* "

" Look here, Breckinge, you'll bear the most honourable wound that ever a man . . . "

Breckinge groaned.

" Anyway, you were shot saving my life and . . . "

" Saving *your* damned life, curse you ! *Your* life ? You blasted swine. "

Wendover's mouth closed tightly.

So that was it !

No, no, the poor chap didn't know what he was saying.

Lying down, Wendover rolled a couple of feet away, stretched out his arm and seized Breckinge's collar.

With a mighty effort he dragged him a few inches nearer.

" Stop it, damn you," groaned Breckinge. " Let me alone. Get back . . . since you can move. Go and . . . collect . . . your damned ' confession. ' "

So that was what the poor chap was worrying about.

This was awful. He must do his best for him.

And slowly, for his shattered leg hurt hideously and the bleeding had broken out afresh, Wendover rolled over, again extended his arm, seized Breckinge by the collar once more, braced himself and pulled.

Breckinge cried aloud in pain, but a few inches had been gained.

And every few seconds a bullet struck the ground close by.

Another effort. But damn it all, at this rate it would take the rest of the day to reach the corner of the wall, and they'd certainly be shot within the next few minutes. It couldn't be more than a few minutes since he himself had been knocked over.

Another agonizing roll, another heave at the completely helpless Breckinge, a few more inches gained.

Once more.

But this time as he hauled there came a gush of blood from Breckinge's mouth. Did that mean the end? If so, he'd better leave him, and get back if he could.

Breckinge opened his eyes and said something. Wendover shifted himself closer to him.

"What's that, old chap?" he said.

"I'm dying . . . I'm dying . . ."

"Not you. Stick it out. We'll get back all right. And, Breckinge, listen . . . Can you hear me? Stick it, Breckinge. Listen! *I'll get you the Victoria Cross for this.* That's something to live for, isn't it?"

"You can keep it. I'm . . . I'm . . ." whispered Breckinge.

"You are a brave man. I won't try to thank you. But you are."

"I am a General's grandson," whispered the dying man.

"By God you are—and he is proud of you. And I am proud to be your . . . your . . . friend, Breckinge."

"*Friend!* To Hell with you . . ."

"You came out to save me"

"To save *you*! I came because I—had to," said Breckinge clearly. "Suddenly something made me come."

And turning his head sideways and looking Wendover full in the face:

"I am . . . a . . . General's . . . grandson," he said distinctly, and died.

There was a rush of feet.

A band of sepoy, headed by Havildar Umrao Singh, dashed round the corner of the Fort, swooped down upon Wendover and bore him to the shelter of the south-west wall.

Ere he fainted, Wendover caught sight of a huddled heap. A man in Pathan clothing. Shere Khan. His eyes were open.

"Stop," Wendover whispered, summoning up his strength.

"Stop, I tell you," he cried. "Bring him in."

And a minute afterwards, he and Shere Khan were carried in through the postern gate.

§ 4

A couple of hours later, his legs roughly but not unskilfully bandaged by a sepoy whose sister had

married a stretcher-bearer, and who was, therefore, something of a surgical authority, Wendover lay and listened to Umrao Singh's report.

The Subedar-Major had, most unfortunately, been killed. A bullet had struck him between the eyes as he superintended the firing before the explosion of the mine.

Subedar Gopal Mangal had been hit, just before the sortie party reached shelter, and had been dragged in by his men. He was in a bad way.

As Havildar Umrao Singh explained, he would himself instantly have rushed out with his Section to bring the Sahib in, but that the Doctor Sahib had absolutely and peremptorily forbidden it. The Doctor Sahib had made the sortie party wall-up the postern gate, and had threatened the Havildar with his revolver when he had expostulated and said that the Captain Sahib should be rescued.

The Doctor Sahib had then directed the defence from the safety of the courtyard, shouting to the men to fire faster and faster, and cursing men who fell wounded.

Then suddenly he had gone mad ; had come up on to the parapet ; had climbed through an embrasure above the gate ; had hung by his hands—and dropped. His feet must have been a man's height from the ground when he let go.

The Havildar had himself snatched up a rifle and fired at every Pathan whom he could see, while shouting to the defenders to continue rapid fire.

The Sahib knew the rest.

He did.

And an amazing thing it was.

Again poor Breckinge had 'reverted to type'; and this time to the higher type. If, for much of his life, he had lived as the son of out-caste degenerate Hindus of the lowest and basest stock, he had died as a European of army-tradition and fighting heredity.

Breckinge, the perjured liar, the cowardly backstabbing murderer, the treacherous, cowardly villain, had died a brave man, doing a deed worthy of reward with the Victoria Cross.

Poor Breckinge. The irony of Fate! Shot in the back, as Wendover once had mockingly foretold. Shot in the back and in the doing of so brave a deed. And in the saving of the man whom he hated so bitterly; hated to the last.

§ 5

The firing from the Pathan position dwindled, became desultory and died away.

For the first time in the long story of its siege, Fort Giltraza had a peaceful night.

And in the morning, new life inspired its weary garrison as, clear, unmistakable, heard and recognized by all, came boom after boom of the guns of a mountain battery.

The relief force was at hand, was shelling the enemy—probably a retreating enemy, in full flight, disappointed, discouraged and disheartened.

And, a few hours later, hours of incredible peace, quiet and release from stress and strain, bugle calls were heard.

The Relief Force, unopposed, was marching on; was marching in; was here.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT a day ! . . .

How nice the Brigadier had been, and how utterly British in his discomfort ; his anxiety to deal adequately with the situation, to say the right thing, and completely to conceal the right emotion.

And how extremely nice his Staff and all the other Officers had been. Charming. In spite of its being so difficult a situation for them—in the circumstances.

An experience as delightful as it was painful.

And Ganesh Hazelrigg, with his marvellous sympathy and loyalty.

§ 2

And having heard Wendover's account of what had happened since he left the Fort, Major Hazelrigg told his own story ; thereafter making clear all things that had been hidden.

He then had his great moment.

" There it is, my son," he concluded, taking an envelope from an inner pocket, extracting a paper and handing it to Wendover, " and the Brigadier shall read it to-night—and then every Officer in this force, before I send it off to Simla."

Richard Wendover took the paper and read Breck-

inge's confession through from beginning to end, and read it through again.

"I wonder if you'll think I'm mad," he said, and holding it in both hands, rested them on the bed before him, as he gazed smiling at his friend.

"I won't try to thank you," he continued. "That would be just futile, silly."

"Very silly," growled Hazelrigg.

"But it cannot be done, old man."

"Can't be done? What d you mean—can't be done? What can't?"

"This can't be used."

"Can't be used? Why, it was written in my presence; signed in the presence of the Subedar-Major and Sheré Khan, who both witnessed it. It is perfect evidence; irrefutable; absolute final *proof*. What more do you want?"

"Nothing more, old chap. There couldn't be more. It's marvellous. It is, as you say, perfect. And I couldn't begin to tell you how grateful . . ."

"Don't begin."

"I won't. But . . . but . . . Will you think me ungrateful?"

"Ungrateful? No. Why? What are you driving at?"

"I'm trying to say that—I'm not going to use it, Ganesh."

"*What?* You're not well. You're not . . . sane."

"Never saner. But I can't."

"I can."

"Yes, but you won't. We're going to burn this."

Hazelrigg stared wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"We're going to burn this."

Hazelrigg continued to stare in silence.

"I was lying out there, being absolutely peppered; and he dashed out and began to drag me away. And then that wasn't good enough for him. Damned if he didn't get me up in his arms and carry me. Carried me, Ganesh—with his body between me and the enemy. And he was shot in the back. I don't think either of us begins to understand what it meant to poor Breckinge to be shot in the back. I once taunted him with it—said that if ever he were shot—in spite of his wonderful care of himself—he'd be shot in the back. He was a great coward, you know, really. I mean, up till now. And the coward died as brave a death as ever a man did."

Still Hazelrigg said nothing.

"He deliberately gave his life for mine," lied Wendover. "To make amends: Doesn't that wash out—everything?"

Silence fell in the little mud-walled cell, Hazelrigg saying nothing because he was unable to speak.

This was a greatness beyond the greatest—that this innocent man, who had suffered so immeasurably, this man who had lost everything, lost all that made life worth living—that he should refuse to take it back, refuse reinstatement in his own proper place, resumption of the life which was his by right. Refuse everything. Because his enemy had made reparation—given his life in redemption. Refuse to *come back*—because coming back meant the exposure of the man who had died for him. And refuse to come back because he was merely pardoned—forgiven for the crime he had never committed. Refuse.

It was impossible. Incredible. Absurd.

And in silence Wendover wrestled with temptation.

How could he lose Life a second time? When it was within his grasp. This life that he so loved; this life that he now knew was the only life for him? Fate had really been rather cruel—to give him this brief taste of it again. The work he loved. Duty. Command. Discipline. His army. His friends. His country. His England . . .

But he couldn't use the confession.

No, it couldn't be done.

"I am a General's grandson."

Poor devil! He had given his life—that he might die as a General's grandson; that he might have, for a brief moment, at the last, self-respect, honour. He had died for an ideal; for worthiness; for honour.

Let him have it.

In his way, and in his last moments, he had been great.

Yes, his death had cancelled out that beastly confession.

Poor devil. Weak, vacillating, cowardly; damned and doomed from the moment of his birth. A victim far more than a villain.

No, that confession must not be used.

He, Wendover, had never yet really done anything of which he was utterly ashamed; anything that had made him feel dirty and degraded. If he published and used that confession now he'd feel *filthy* for the rest of his life.

"Ganesh," he said, "I feel ashamed to ask it of you.

I feel an incredibly ungrateful hound—but I beg you, let me tear this up.”

“I understand,” replied Ganesh Hazelrigg, gentleman.

He knew his man. And, with a sigh, he rose, and from his pocket produced a box of matches.

With slightly trembling hand, Wendover held the paper out beyond the bed.

Hazelrigg struck a match and set it to a corner of the document.

It flared up, and Wendover dropped it to the floor, where it burned itself out.

Hazelrigg set his foot upon it, his face grave and sad.

“How’s Shere Khan this morning?” asked Wendover.

“Doing splendidly,” replied Hazelrigg.

“See you later,” he said, and went from the room.

And Richard Wendover lay and thought of Sybil Ffoulkes. She would have approved, he decided—and then doubted that decision.

